

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 30/010/2009
3 September 2009

Homophobic attacks on the rise in Italy

In the wake of three serious homophobic attacks in Rome over last 10 days, Amnesty International is concerned by mounting evidence pointing to the rise of intolerance towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Italy and calls for effective investigations and preventive measures.

On 22 August 2009, a gay couple were reportedly assaulted by a far-right activist nicknamed “little swastika” after leaving a nightclub in Rome, and being observed kissing in public. One of the victims was allegedly stabbed with a knife and required life-saving surgery. The alleged assailant was initially released on bail, before taken back into custody pending trial.

On 29 August 2009, another nightclub in Rome which organises a well-known weekly gay night was subject to an attempted arson attack, when a window was broken and inflammable liquid ignited. Nobody was hurt, as the building was closed for refurbishment at the time and the flames were rapidly extinguished by the fire-brigade.

On 2 September 2009, two large fire-crackers were thrown by two skin-heads into a crowd of passers-by on San Giovanni in Laterano Street in Rome. The street is well-known for being popular with Rome’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Fortunately, only one person was slightly injured. The two attackers were able to escape and a police investigation has been opened.

Several other homophobic attacks have been reported in the last few weeks in Rome and other towns across Italy. No official statistics on hate crimes targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are retained. However, Arcigay, Italy’s leading gay rights organization, which documents homophobic incidents, has recorded as many reported incidents in the first eight months of 2009 as in the whole of 2008.

Against this background, Amnesty International calls on the Italian authorities to ensure that crimes targeting individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity are effectively investigated and that anyone reasonably identified as responsible to be brought to justice. The Italian authorities should also place greater emphasis on combating homophobic attitudes and ensuring greater security for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people.

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