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Latvia: Celebrating rights -- fighting prejudice

On 3 June, Amnesty International members from all over Europe will participate in Riga Pride march in solidarity with Latvian lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people, who are facing widespread hostility and discrimination. Amnesty International calls on the Latvian authorities to ensure that the Pride march will receive adequate police protection, and to exercise their leadership to promote respect for diversity, not foster a climate of intolerance.

“This year’s Riga Pride is an excellent opportunity for Latvia to spearhead change in north-east Europe by respecting the right to freedom of assembly and expression of LGBT groups,” said Anders Dahlbeck, Amnesty International’s researcher on Latvia.

“By providing adequate police protection for the Pride participants and refraining from making homophobic statements, the Latvian authorities could prove that lessons have been learnt from previous years, and that Latvia is prepared to guarantee human rights for all.”

Riga Pride, which is organized by the local LGBT organization Mozaika, will also be attended by a Swedish minister, and several members of parliaments and members of the European parliament from all over Europe.

In 2005 and 2006, events organized by LGBT groups in Latvia were attacked verbally and physically by counter-demonstrators, without receiving adequate police protection. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Latvian authorities to respect and protect the right to freedom of assembly for LGBT people and to refrain from making homophobic statements or statement which may incite hatred towards them.

Amnesty International has made similar calls over the past year to the authorities in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, expressing concern that they have fostered a climate of intolerance against LGBT people and obstructed public events organized by LGBT groups, amid homophobic language used by some highly placed politicians.

The right to freedom of assembly for LGBT people in many parts of Eastern Europe has been under threat over the past years. During an LGBT event in Moscow last Sunday several LGBT activists were beaten up by counter-protesters and several activists were detained by Russian law enforcement officers. On 21 May this year, an LGBT tolerance event in Lithuania was banned by the authorities. LGBT events have also been attacked or banned in places such as Poland, Romania and Moldova over the past couple of years.

See also:

Poland and Latvia: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Poland and Latvia (AI Index: EUR 01/019/2006) <http://www.amnesty.org/library/index/engEUR010192006>

Public Document

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