

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Amnesty International condemns adoption of homophobic law in Lithuania

The Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament) voted today to adopt the controversial “Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information”. The law was initially approved by the Seimas on 16 June but was vetoed by the Lithuanian President on 26 June. With a majority of the 140 Seimas representatives required to overcome the Presidential veto, 87 parliamentarians voted in favour. 25 parliamentarians abstained and only six voted against the law. The law will enter into force on 1 March 2010.

Amnesty International is concerned that the law violates the right to freedom of expression and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation as set out in international and regional human rights treaties that Lithuania is party to.

Article 4 of the law lists 19 categories of information that are considered to have a “*detrimental effect on the development of minors*” and which are banned from schools, public places and media where they could be viewed by children. Sub-section 13 of Article 4 prohibits “*Information which agitates for homosexual, bisexual and polygamous relations*”.

An explanatory note accompanying the law states that “*the propagation of a non-traditional sexual orientation and exposure to information containing positive coverage of homosexual relations may cause negative consequences for the physical, mental and, first and foremost, moral development of minors.*”

The law classifies public information about homosexuality and bisexuality alongside material that portrays physical or psychological violence and the display of dead or mutilated bodies. Also prohibited is material that “*encourages gambling, encourages and suggests participation in the games of chance, lotteries and other games that imply easy win*”, “*displays a hypnosis session*” or “*promotes bad eating, sanitary and physical passivity habits*”.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that this law will institutionalise homophobia and could be used to prohibit any legitimate discussion of homosexuality, impede the work of human rights defenders and further the stigmatization of and prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Far from protecting children, the law deprives young people of their right to freedom of expression and access to information and risks isolating children who are already amongst the most at risk of violence at school or within the family.

Amnesty International calls on the Lithuanian government to uphold its international human rights obligations and repeal the discriminatory “Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information”.

The organization further calls on the Lithuanian government to:

- Ensure that all persons in Lithuania, including children, fully enjoy the right to freedom of expression – including the right to seek, receive and impart information;
- Prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity;

- Provide adequate and non-discriminatory information and support to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender young people.

End/