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Serbia: Brutal attack against LGBTI activist highlights the need to tackle prejudice and secure safe Belgrade Pride

A participant of the International Conference “The future belongs to us: LGBT rights on the road to the European Union” was brutally attacked in the early hours of 13 September in central Belgrade.

Reports from local organizations and media suggest that the attack was motivated by homophobic and xenophobic hatred. According to the conference organisers, Labris Organization for Lesbian Human Rights, the victim, a foreign national, sustained serious injuries to the head and brain and remains in a critical condition following emergency surgery.

Coming just 10 days before the Belgrade Pride, this attack is a grim reminder of the threats and attacks that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people still face in the country. The perpetrators must be identified and brought to justice.

Following the attack, participants of the conference took to the streets to protest against the violence LGBTI people face in Serbia. The march went ahead peacefully under heavy police protection.

Amnesty International notes that Minister of Interior Nebojša Stefanović condemned the attack and promised that the police would do their utmost to find the perpetrators. Some arrests have been already made, although details about them are not yet available.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to prevent further attacks and to carry out a prompt and thorough investigation into the attack. Suspects identified should be brought to trial in fair proceedings. The investigation must seek to establish whether the attack was motivated by the victim's sexual orientation and/or nationality. If established, such a motive should be adequately reflected in sentencing.

The Belgrade Pride has been called off for each of the last three years, as alleged security concerns and an apparent lack of political will prevented it from happening. Every effort must be made by the police to ensure that it can go ahead this year safely and visibly.

Background

Attacks against individuals perpetrated on grounds of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity constitute a form of discrimination. The Serbian Assembly in December 2012, adopted an amendment to Article 54 of the Criminal Code, providing for the existence of a hate motive to be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing. Article 54(a) states that, “If the offence was committed out of hatred because of race and religion, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity of another person, the court will appreciate the fact as an aggravating circumstance, unless it is not prescribed as an element of a criminal offence”.