

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

14 June 2016
AI Index: EUR 50/4258/2016

Ukraine: Kyiv Pride: a genuine celebration of human rights

Amnesty International welcomes the cooperation and protection provided by the National Police of Ukraine and the Kyiv City State Administration during a successful lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) Pride march which took place in Kyiv, Ukraine on 12 June. In contrast to previous years, Ukraine upheld its international obligation to protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly for LGBTI people. This was an important step to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, and provides a welcome example for a region where in many countries, Prides are often attacked by violent mobs.

Up to 2,000 people gathered in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, on 12 June to march for LGBTI equality. They were undeterred by prior threats from far-right groups who promised to turn the event into “bloody porridge” and attempts by counter-demonstrators to disturb the march on the day. Almost 7,000 police and other law enforcement officers were present at the scene and in the vicinity to guard the rally. Police took comprehensive security measures to protect the march, including sealing off several neighbouring streets and closing a subway station to prevent possible attacks.

The police detained 57 people who were planning to attack the participants ahead of the gathering or attempted to do so during the march. One Pride participant suffered moderate injuries and was sent to hospital after he was attacked by several unidentified individuals after he left the Pride. An investigation has been launched to identify the perpetrators.

Representatives of diplomatic missions and of international organisations in Ukraine took part in the Pride. Seven MPs from the Verkhovna Rada (the Parliament of Ukraine) also attended the march to show solidarity with members of Ukraine’s LGBTI communities.

Negotiations between the Pride organizers and the National Police of Ukraine and the Kyiv City State Administration started weeks ahead of the event. These negotiations involved several meetings to negotiate and coordinate the route and the necessary security measures.

In 2012 and 2014, Pride marches in Kyiv were cancelled at the last moment after the police told the organizing committee that they could not ensure the safety of participants, following threats from far-right groups. In 2015, when the police agreed to provide protection only at the last moment before the rally, and failed to agree a security plan with the organisers, the Pride march was cut short after about 10 protesters were injured by the far-right groups who attacked the demonstration.

At least five police officers were also injured, one seriously.

Background Information

In the past, the Ukrainian authorities have failed to protect and ensure the right to peaceful assembly of LGBTI people.

In 2012, a Pride march planned for 20 May was cancelled by the organizers because they had received threats of violence from various individuals and groups, and because the Kyiv police failed to guarantee the safety of the demonstrators, telling them that “people would get hurt”.

Another Pride march planned for 5 July 2014 was also cancelled after the police told the organizing committee, at short notice, that they could not ensure the safety of participants in the face of expected counter-demonstrations.

The first LGBTI Pride in Ukraine was held in 2013, attracting 100 participants and 500 counter-protesters. The march was held on the outskirts of the city, following a court order banning the marchers from the city centre. The march coincided with the Kyiv Day celebrations. The local authorities at the municipality where the march was held applied for a court order to ban all demonstrations not linked to the official celebrations, but this application was dismissed.

During the 2015 Kyiv Pride, there was a lack of coordination between the event organizers and law enforcement agencies, and no evacuation plan was put in place. As a result, despite the presence of at least 1,500 police and National Guard officers, about 10 protesters were injured when they were attacked by homophobic protesters. At least five police officers were also injured, one of whom was left in a serious condition. The police arrested at least 28 counter-protesters, but only four were brought to court on hooliganism charges. All four received two-year conditional prison sentences.

In May 2014, Ukraine adopted the country's first Anti-Discrimination Law. Despite calls from campaigners to explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity as prohibited grounds of discrimination, the final text did not mention these terms.

In November 2015, Ukrainian lawmakers passed an amendment to the Labour Code of Ukraine which expressly banned discrimination based on race, disability, and a host of other characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This change to the law had been strongly resisted by Ukrainian lawmakers in previous years.

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