

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Latvia: Leading politicians make remarks which may have incited to verbal and physical attacks**

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by statements made by leading Latvian politicians in the run-up to the first ever Gay Pride march in Latvia.

On 20 July, the executive director of the Riga City Council, Eriks Skapars, withdrew permission for the gay and lesbian community to hold a Gay Pride march on 23 July. Eriks Skapars' decision came after a statement in a television interview by Latvia's prime minister, Aigars Kalvitis, that he could not "accept that a parade of sexual minorities takes place in the middle of our capital city next to the Dom Cathedral. This is not acceptable. Latvia is a state based on Christian values. We cannot advertise things which are not acceptable to the majority of our society."

On 19 July 2005, the deputy speaker of the Latvian parliament, Leopolds Ozolins, issued an open letter regarding the Gay Pride march in which he uses highly offensive language about gays and lesbians. Leopolds Ozolins is also alleged to have made highly critical remarks regarding the European Union's "open and accepting attitude" towards gay and lesbian persons.

The organisers of the march subsequently made an official complaint to the Riga administrative court regarding the decision to ban the march. On 22 July 2005, the administrative court decided to annul Eriks Skapars' decision to withdraw the permission for the march. On 23 July 2005, the march went ahead as originally planned.

Organisers and news media covering the event estimate that approximately 300 people participated in the march. Meanwhile, over a thousand persons had gathered to stage a protest against the march. Some of the protesters tried to block the march, while others used teargas and threw eggs at the marchers. The Latvian law enforcement officers managed to protect the marchers. In total, six of the protesters were arrested, including two who carried Nazi symbols on their clothing.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the comments made by the prime minister and by the deputy speaker of the parliament and the effect they may have had. Amnesty International fears such comments from the authorities may encourage a climate of intolerance and hatred, and that they may incite verbal and physical attacks against gay and lesbian persons, such as those that took place on 23 July 2005 during the Gay Pride march.

In light of the initial ban on the march, Amnesty International would like to remind the Latvian government of Latvia's international obligations, under international human rights law and standards. Amnesty International urges you to uphold the rights encoded in article 2, 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which sets out the rights to freedom from discrimination, freedom of

expression and freedom of association respectively.

Amnesty International urges the prime minister to exercise leadership to ensure that the Latvian government actively promote these rights and work to build a society where they can be enjoyed by all.