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## **Russia: St. Petersburg must allow Pride to go ahead**

The St. Petersburg authorities must allow a peaceful Pride march organized by the city's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community to go ahead as planned on Saturday, 7 July, Amnesty International said after an agreement for the event was withdrawn.

St. Petersburg Pride organizers applied to authorities in different districts of the city to agree on a route for the event in advance. An agreement had been reached earlier this week to hold it at Poliustrov Park on the city's outskirts, but on Thursday the authorities backtracked on this plan, citing numerous complaints against the decision as the reason for the change.

"It is time for St. Petersburg to portray itself as a global city where tolerance and respect for human rights are held high and where there is no place for discrimination," said Sergei Nikitin, Director of the Moscow Office of Amnesty International.

In the last two years, local NGO Ravnopravie (equality) has submitted applications to the authorities to hold a Pride for St. Petersburg's LGBT community. Different courts in St. Petersburg have ruled against the authorities' repeated refusal to let Pride proceed.

St. Petersburg authorities have suggested on a number of occasions that Pride organizers hold the event in remote areas of the city, only to withdraw their agreement at the last minute.

"Such behaviour paints the St. Petersburg authorities in a very negative light, as they are flouting their international obligations to protect the basic human rights of all city residents," said Nikitin.

In March 2012, a new law was adopted in St. Petersburg, banning "propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality and transgenerness among minors" in the city.

Two months later, LGBT rights activist Nikolai Alekseyev was sentenced to a fine for such alleged "propaganda", simply for holding aloft a banner quoting a famous Soviet actress who said "homosexuality is not a perversity, perverse is hockey on grass and ballet on ice".

Since the adoption of the law, thousands of people all around the world, including some 30,000 Amnesty International activists have written to the St. Petersburg authorities, urging them to stop human rights abuses against LGBT people and to let the St. Petersburg Pride go ahead unhindered.

Last month, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe called on Russia to explain how the country intended to uphold its obligations under human rights law after the adoption of similar "homosexuality propaganda" laws in several regions of the country.

"This is a moment of truth for St. Petersburg city authorities – by allowing this weekend's Pride to go ahead peacefully, they have a chance to show that they do respect human rights, including the right to peaceful assembly, and that they do not discriminate against any members of society," said Sergei

Nikitin.