

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Serbian government should provide its full support to the Belgrade Pride

Amnesty International calls on the authorities in Serbia to provide full and public support to the Belgrade Pride (Parada ponosa), which the organizers announced would take place on 2 October 2011. In view of the significant challenges faced at the Pride last year, the support of the government of Serbia for this initiative is key to ensuring that those concerned can again exercise their right to freedom of assembly and expression.

Amnesty International notes that the Minister of Interior, Ivica Dačić, in recently expressing publicly his concerns about the serious security risks associated with the forthcoming Pride, has also called for the support of the government, the President and the Mayor of Belgrade.

This is the fourth time that Pride has been planned in Belgrade. In 2010, police protected participants against violent counter-demonstrators and more than 100 people, mostly police, were injured. The damage to property in the city was estimated to be more than €1 million. In 2009, the Pride march had also been scheduled for September but did not take place after the authorities refused to provide security at the last moment following threats from nationalist groups.

Under international standards to which Serbia is a state party, the Serbian government has a duty to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including against threats of violence. Threats which aim at nullifying the rights of freedom of assembly and expression of others, and which amount to incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence against Pride organizers and participants are in violation of international human rights law. Whilst a demonstration may annoy or give offence to persons opposed to the ideas or claims that it is seeking to promote, the participants must be able to hold the demonstration without having to fear that they will be subjected to physical violence by persons or groups opposed to their ideas.

In outlining its concerns, Amnesty International refers to the “Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly” published in 2007 by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and which “aim to develop guidelines with a view to formulating minimum standards that should be met by national authorities in their regulation of this right”.

Amnesty International notes, both in the context of the Pride and in general, that the police and judicial authorities should act with due diligence to protect people, including LGBT people, against violence, and without discrimination. The authorities also have a duty to make clear that discriminatory violence is a criminal offence and will not be tolerated. Specific directives and training should be given to law enforcement officials on how to identify and investigate homophobic crimes. All allegations should be properly investigated, the perpetrators brought to justice and adequate redress provided to the victims.