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## **Homophobic law to enter into force in Lithuania**

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Lithuania to remove all restrictions on the distribution of public information relating to the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people decreed in a new law.

The controversial “Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information” enters into force next Monday, 1 March.

“This law will violate the freedom of expression and will directly discriminate against people on account of their sexual orientation or gender identity,” said John Dalhuisen, expert on discrimination at Amnesty International.

“It will stigmatize gay and lesbian people and exposes advocates for their rights to the risk of censorship and financial penalties.”

“This law is an anachronism in the European Union.”

The law, as originally adopted on 14 July 2009, was criticized by Amnesty International and other international organizations, including the European Parliament, for containing homophobic and discriminatory provisions.

In its original version the law prohibited the publication of “information which agitates for homosexual, bisexual and polygamous relations” in places, including schools, public spaces and media which are accessible to persons under 18 years of age.

In the light of international criticism and the misgivings of the Lithuanian President, the law was amended on 28 December 2009. All direct references to the promotion of homosexuality have been removed. However, the amended law now classifies any information which “denigrates family values” or which “encourages a concept of marriage and family other than stipulated in the Constitution ... and the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania” as detrimental to children and consequently bans it from places accessible to them. As marriage is defined in Lithuanian law as the union of a man and a woman, any public promotion of same-sex partnerships, or advocacy for equality in marriage, would be prohibited under the new law.

“The Lithuanian authorities must not implement the law which discriminates against gay and lesbian people and restricts their freedom of expression,” John Dalhuisen said.