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Lithuanian President must support Baltic Pride march

Amnesty International has called on the Lithuanian President, Dalia Grybauskaite, to ensure that the 2010 Baltic Pride march goes ahead on 8 May despite a new attempt to have it banned.

A Vilnius court is to rule tomorrow on a request by the country's Interim Attorney General to ban the march on the grounds that it would constitute a threat to public order.

The parade is Lithuania's first in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and there is a strong possibility that counter-demonstrators may gather.

"If there is a threat to public order on the day of the march it will not come from its participants," said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International's expert on discrimination in Europe.

"The authorities are obliged under international and national law to guarantee rights of freedom of expression and assembly to all. They must tackle any threat to the march and not the march itself."

In March, over 50 Lithuanian parliamentarians tried to have the march banned alleging that it would violate the controversial Law on the Detrimental Effect of Public Information on Minors, which came into force earlier this year.

Vilnius police have told organizers that measures will be put in place so that the risk of public disorder arising from actions of counter-demonstrators is negligible.

"The Baltic Pride march is a milestone for the rights of lesbian and gay people in Lithuania," John Dalhuisen said.

"It has the support of activists from the other two Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, and from international organizations such as Amnesty International"

"The banning of the march, or the failure to ensure the safety of its participants, would send a signal to all Lithuanians, and the rest of the world, that human rights are only selectively upheld there."