

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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EU: ENSURE POLAND AND LATVIA RESPECT RIGHTS OF MINORITIES

If the EU wants 2007 to be “European year of Equal Opportunities”, it needs to ensure as of now that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people can freely express, assemble and associate in countries such as Poland and Latvia.

Amnesty International is concerned that despite public attention to a string of homophobic incidents - in some cases actions and statements by the very authorities of these countries - little has been done to redress the situation and guarantee the basic rights of LGBT persons.

In a briefing paper, (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International recalls the most serious incidents that occurred in the past two years and highlights all that still needs to be done if Latvia and Poland are to live up to the EU's values and rules.

“After so much emphasis on entry-criteria, it is essential that the EU applies the same firmness, if not more, now that both countries are full EU Member States,” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

In Poland, the person who replaced the director for the national teaching agency - dismissed for accepting a standard Council of Europe manual on anti-discrimination – has recently declared that homosexuality is contrary to human nature. These examples contradict the assurances presented by the Polish President during his visit to Brussels in August.

In Latvia, authorities have also failed to provide credible guarantees that homophobic incidents will not be tolerated. This summer's refusal to grant permission for the “Riga Pride 2006” march on account that police could not assure the security of the participants is a worrying signal that authorities are not living up to their obligations. Also worrying was the two-hour delay of significant police presence at the hotel where participants of a conference on LGBT rights were being attacked by protesters.

“When serious offenses such as these are not accounted for, it can create a climate of fear and intimidation,” Oosting added.

In a letter, Amnesty International has asked the EU to:

- Support the right of freedom of assembly, including “Pride Marches” and similar events in all Member States;
- Take concrete steps to monitor the implementation of EU standards against discrimination in Member States;
- Ensure that police cooperation in Europe includes training of law enforcement officials on how to address homophobic violence.