

Ukraine: Homophobic violence mars gay pride rally in Kyiv

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Gay Pride – Kiev, Ukraine 2013. Credit: Amnesty International

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Despite efforts by police today, Ukrainian authorities should have done more in advance to prevent violent attacks against gay Pride marchers several of whom were injured today, Amnesty International said.

Lack of coordination with the event organisers and the failure to put an evacuation plan in place meant that, despite the presence of at least 1,500 police and national guard soldiers, about 10 protesters were injured when they were attacked by homophobic protesters. At least five police were also injured, one seriously.

“The homophobic violence which soiled the streets of Kyiv today was ugly and action should have been taken in advance to try and prevent it. Instead of responding to violent threats by taking steps to ensure marchers would be safe, the police only took the decision to provide protection to the march yesterday. Had more time been spent planning and coordinating, some of these injuries might have been avoided,” said Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty International’s deputy director for Europe and Central Asia.

“It is vital that the authorities investigate and prosecute those responsible for the violence and ensure that they do more to protect members of the LGBTI community from attack in the future.”

In 2012 and 2014 Pride marches in Kyiv were cancelled at the last moment after the police told the organising committee that they could not ensure the safety of participants following threats. This year there were again threats from the radical right-wing groups, Svoboda and Pravyi Sektor. Police held meetings with event organisers to try and dissuade them from holding the event but eventually agreed to protect the march, at a meeting on Friday 5 June.

For safety reasons the route of the march was kept secret until the last moment and the march set off at 10am with more than 250 marchers. They came under sustained attack soon after setting off. Although the police took action to protect marchers, arresting at least 28 counter-protesters, there were incidents where not enough was done. One witness described to Amnesty International how a cordon of police did nothing to protect international observers who were being chased by a violent mob.

“It is very sad that an event intended as a celebration of equality, diversity and the rights of freedom of expression and assembly should attract this kind of violent homophobia and that the authorities efforts to protect them fell short,” said Denis Krivosheev.

“Nevertheless, the fact that the march went ahead as planned means that Ukraine has passed an important test of tolerance. It was not a test that was passed smoothly or without pain and it is clear that the country still has a long way to travel along the road to a more tolerant society.”

Background

President Petro Poroshenko backed the activists' constitutional right to march and Amnesty International members sent some 20,000 signatures urging the authorities to protect the march.

French, American, Dutch and Swedish diplomats joined the rally, marching in a personal capacity

Ukraine has repeatedly failed to protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly of LGBTI people in the past.

In 2012, a Pride march planned for 20 May was cancelled by the organizers because they had received threats of violence from various individuals and groups, and because the Kyiv police failed to guarantee the safety of the demonstrators, telling them “people would get hurt”.

Another Pride march planned for 5 July 2014 was also cancelled after the police told the organizing committee, at short notice, that they could not ensure the safety of participants in the face of expected counter-demonstrations.

The first LGBTI Pride in Ukraine was held in 2013, attracting 100 participants and 500 counter-protesters. The march was held on the outskirts of the city, after a court order banning the marchers from the city centre. The march coincided with Kyiv Day celebrations, and the municipality in the capital had applied – unsuccessfully – for a ban on all demonstrations not linked to the official celebrations.