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world briefs

NETHERLANDS

Following three murders of gay men in a forest often used for cruising, the police department of Rotterdam has created the "Gay Team," a two-man unit working exclusively on matters involving sexual minorities.

Officers Wietse Lantinga and Dick Snaterse focus on homophobic harassment, violence, blackmail, extortion, vandalism, and rape—and on getting to know the queer community, reported the newspaper *De Gay Krant*.

"Many gay men are married and hide their homosexuality," Snaterse noted. "When they become crime victims, they don't report it to the police."



Four open gay men and lesbians and six closeted gay men and lesbians won seats in the Netherlands' Parliament in the recent elections, *De Gay Krant* reported May 28.

Those who "do not conceal their sexual identity," as the newspaper phrased it, are Anne Lize van der Stoel, Ries Smits, Clemens Cornielje and Boris Dittrich.

RUSSIA

Legislation mandating testing of so-called HIV "risk groups" and foreigners awaits approval by the Russian parliament, the newspaper *Novaya Yezhednevnyaya Gazeta* reported June 7.

The draft law authorizes police to identify high-risk individuals and bring them in for forced testing, the newspaper said.



SWEDEN

Sweden's parliament legalized same-sex marriage June 7, by a vote of 171-141 with 5 abstentions and 32 absences.

Sweden is the third country to allow gay men and lesbians to marry. Denmark was first, in 1989, and Norway followed, in 1993.

The law comes into effect the first of 1995.

The margin of the win was a surprise to gay activists, who thought they might win or lose by two votes.

Leading liberal MP Barbro Westerholm, leader of the parliamentary effort, received a standing ovation when she appeared at the center.

As in Denmark and Norway, the law grants same-sex spouses all rights of marriage except access to adoption, artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, and church weddings. And, as in the other countries, one partner must be a citizen living in his or her homeland.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Carl Bildt welcomed the law, saying: "We accept homosexual love as equivalent to heterosexual. Love is an important force to personal as well as social development, and should therefore not be denied."

The parliamentary debate lasted six hours. Opponents said the law would affect too few people to be worth the effort. Supportive MPs gave thoughtful testimony on the situation of lesbians and gay men in society.

TASMANIA

After repeated failed attempts to change anti-sodomy legislation in Tasmania, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has declared such legislation a violation of civil and human rights

laid out in the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. In April, the Tasmanian Parliament rejected an attempt to repeal the anti-sodomy law, with the backing of the ruling Liberal Party government.

The U.N.'s decision is the first of its kind and could be of far-reaching significance for human rights activists around the world. In the United States, there are some two dozen states which still have anti-sodomy legislation on their books.

Tasmania, a sparsely populated island south of Melbourne, is the only Australian state with this type of legislation. Civil rights activists are hoping the U.N. decision will sufficiently embarrass the Australian government that it will intervene with the state.



Three members of the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group walked into Hobart's main police station May 12 and presented officers with prepared statements on their sexual behavior. The move was made in an effort to force the Australian government to overturn Tasmania's anti-sodomy laws. The activists were not arrested, although police officials say their statements will be investigated with the possible result of future charges. Tasmanian state law prohibits oral and anal sex between men and carries a maximum 21-year sentence.

THAILAND

A real estate company announced June 1 plans to build an 800-home community exclusively for gay men.

The Wachira Royal Valley company will erect "Flora Town" 90 miles northeast of Bangkok near the town of Nakhon Ratchasima, project manager Dejdiow Srichai told the Reuters news service.

"There are many, many gay men living in Thailand now, and I think they would like a little privacy and to live in beautiful surroundings," Dejdiow said.

The \$10-million, 80-acre community is slated to open in 18 months. Foreign gay men will be welcome.

UGANDA

Ugandan Catholic Bishop Edward Baharagata denounced the government's condom distribution program June 3, saying it promotes immorality and will cause more AIDS deaths, reported the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

The government of President Yoweri Museveni has been handing out millions of free condoms, calling them the cheapest and most effective way to fight AIDS.

Catholic doctrine forbids sex acts that cannot lead to pregnancy—including gay sex, masturbation and oral sex. The church permits only "natural" birth control, wherein a woman monitors her vaginal mucus to determine fertile periods of the menstrual cycle.

UNITED STATES

Five members of the Lesbian Avengers disrupted a formal dinner for the United Nations Development Fund for Women and demanded the inclusion of lesbians in all its programs. The five women paid \$250 each to attend the dinner, while 50 other Avengers demonstrated outside. There are differing accounts of the disruption, but Avenger Michelle Cronk allegedly grabbed a microphone onstage and read a list of demands while the other four Avengers handed out pamphlets. The five women were forced to leave the dinner. The pamphlet listed eight demands which included putting lesbians at the top of the UNIFEM human rights agenda.

The Lesbian Avengers plan to follow up by attempting to schedule a meeting with UNIFEM official Liz Daly Byrne, according to Cronk. If the meeting is set, the Avengers will have to send representatives other than "the U.N. five," who were photographed and identified by U.N. security.

Compiled by Jann Gilbert and Rex Wockner