

world briefs

CANADA

A gay man from Venezuela was granted refugee status in Canada on Jan. 24, after officials convinced themselves he had been tortured and raped three times by Venezuelan police because he is gay.

Jose Luis Ortigoza showed both physical and psychological signs of torture, Canadian doctors told a panel of the Immigration and Refugee Board.

"There are no words for how I feel," Ortigoza told the *Toronto Star*.

Ortigoza arrived in Toronto on Nov. 6 to meet his lover, Carl Rizzo of New York. They met in 1992 in Venezuela. The two originally intended to stay briefly in Toronto to improve Ortigoza's chances of getting a visa to live with Rizzo in New York.

Rizzo now plans to seek Canadian citizenship.

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A new statement from Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has lesbian and gay activists worried that the federal government has put its promise to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation on the back burner, reported *Toronto's Globe and Mail*.

The government has pledged repeatedly in recent years to amend the Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination against gay men and lesbians, and it was looking like Justice Minister Allan Rock was going to be the man to finally pull it off this year.

Then Chrétien stated, "[The antidiscrimination measure] is part of our commitment and we have...four more years in our mandate."

Eight of Canada's 12 provinces and territories already ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

CUBA

A drag queen living in the U.S. refugee camp at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba talked to the Associated Press in hopes that gay men in San Francisco would read the article and help him and his friends emigrate to the United States.

The refugee camp houses people who tried to flee Cuba last year in homemade boats.

The man is one of 21 gay men housed apart from the other 1,900 inmates for their own protection, said U.S. Army Capt. David Lee.

Lee added that the shows the man and his pals present at the camp are "good," and said the military is trying to get more drag props and supplies for the troupe.

GERMANY

Berlin's new band of Lesbian Avengers staged a kiss-in the Sunday before Christmas at west Berlin's popular Christmas Market. "[We] were first going around the market in small groups of two to six, kissing constantly, before assembling in the center [to] sing some rearranged Christmas songs with new dyke text," participants wrote on the Internet.

"There were 50 to 100 dykes.... Some of the hets didn't really know how to deal with us. Some tried very hard to look away, while others tried very hard to look friendly."

One woman told the group they ruined her Christmas by desecrating sacred songs. One man shouted, "Under Hitler you would have been lined up against the wall and shot—bang, bang, bang."

GREAT BRITAIN

Britain's Ministry of Defense has a "secret index of lesbians and gay men," reports the BBC Radio Five Live program *Out This Week*.

A former sergeant in the Royal Military Police, Caroline Meaghr, told the program that data on the "sexual life" of all persons whose names have come up in military investigations are stored on computers in an office in London's Earls Court.

The information has been shared with civilian

police, she said, giving those dismissed from the military for homosexuality a criminal record.

Britain's data protection registrar is investigating the report, because the military's failure to register the fact that it keeps information on a person's "sexual life" would violate Britain's Data Protection Act.

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April 1995 marks the 100th anniversary of British gay playwright Oscar Wilde's conviction for sodomy, and gay actor Sir John Gielgud, 90, kicked off commemorations this month by unveiling a plaque honoring Wilde at London's Theatre Royal.



During the ceremony, Gielgud revealed that he had met Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas.

"I found him rather disappointing," Gielgud confessed.

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands recently passed a new law banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment (hiring, recruitment, salary, promotion and firing), education, and the provision of goods and services, reported *The Euroletter*, a publication of Denmark's National Organization for Gays and Lesbians.

SERBIA

Government response to HIV/AIDS in Serbia amounts to nothing more than a periodic release of statistics, reports the Belgrade publication *Women in Black Notebooks*.

Two hundred forty people have died from complications of AIDS and 298 are living with HIV. Statistics show that of those who are currently positive, 206 shared needles, 29 were infected via straight sex, 16 are hemophiliacs, and 8 were infected through gay sex.

The news report said the incidence of HIV transmission from gay-male sex was probably vastly underreported.

"From time to time the number of people deceased, ill and infected by HIV is announced publicly, and that is all," the article said. "That is the end of the state's care. In Serbia condoms were never available in public places and free distribution of syringes is, for us, equal to science fiction."

"There is only one institution which is accepting AIDS-infected people for treatment—the Sixth Ward of Belgrade's Infectious and Tropical Disease Clinic," the report continued.

SPAIN

The government will consider creating registered partnership for same-sex and heterosexual couples this spring, Madrid sexual minority leaders report.

Legislation written by lesbian and gay groups has received support in the media, regional parliaments, and the federal parliament, which last month voted to tell the government to write its own proposal.

Most, if not all, rights of marriage except adoption are expected to be included in the final plan. Individuals may adopt in Spain regardless of their sexuality.

Some 30 Spanish cities register "civil unions," including Barcelona, Cordoba, Granada, Ibiza, Toledo and Valencia (which has a regional law).

Compiled by Rex Wockner



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