

WORLD news BRIEFS

BRAZIL

The country's Superior Tribunal of Justice ruled Feb. 11 that businessman Milton Alves Pedrosa is entitled to half the estate of his deceased partner, Jair Batista Prearo.

In an ongoing battle with his partner's parents, Alves Pedrosa won in a lower court then lost at the appeals level before winning this final ruling.

Meanwhile, Brazilian Congresswoman Marta Suplicy has introduced legislation to recognize same-sex civil unions. The measure is slated to be considered by the Chamber of Deputies later this year.

CANADA

British Columbia's groundbreaking law giving gay and lesbian couples the same rights and obligations as heterosexuals in the areas of child support, custody and access took effect Feb. 4.

It is the first law of its kind in North America.

If a same-sex couple breaks up, children will be entitled to spend time with and receive support from both parents. The partners can seek child-support payments from each other and the children can sue for support.

British Columbia has adopted several other gay-inclusive measures: Partners of civil servants receive spousal benefits, welfare officials recognize same-sex households when calculating benefits, same-sex couples have equal adoption rights, and gay and lesbian partners are recognized under provisions regulating insider trading of securities.

EUROPE

Two unnamed European men have become the first gay people to receive aid from the Swiss Fund for Needy Victims of the Holocaust, according to the *Washington Blade* and Swiss gay activists.

The fund—which targets Nazi victims who never received Holocaust compensation or have otherwise suffered ongoing hardship—was created after the Swiss government and Swiss banks were accused of storing gold stolen by the Nazis, failing to disclose the location of the gold after the war, and denying Holocaust survivors and their descendants access to dormant accounts.

The two men, of whom one lives in France and the other in Poland, received about \$1,330 each from a pot of \$195 million that is awaiting distribution.

The French man was held in a concentration camp for six months at age 18 and then forced into the German army. The Polish man was jailed at age 17 for violating Nazi Germany's sodomy law and remained jailed until the end of the war.

FRANCE

The government is planning to change its civil code so that cohabiting same-sex couples can sign contracts that give them most of the legal and tax benefits of matrimony.

The "common interest pacts" will also be available to heterosexual partners and couples whose relationship is not sexual.

The scheme will not extend rights to adoption or state-funded alternative insemination.

Other nations with gay-partnership laws that resemble marriage include Denmark, Greenland, Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

LATVIA

A gay bar was bombed in Riga on Feb. 10. The 4:15 am explosion outside the club Purvs destroyed the front wall and blew out all the windows in the club and surrounding buildings.

No one was injured in the blast, which, according to media speculation, may have been the work of the extremist Latvian National Democratic Party.

LNDP literature has called for a wide-ranging campaign against gay men and lesbians and referred to Purvs as "a den of degenerates."

A spokesman for Riga's Homosexuality Information Center called the blast "a logical consequence of the reluctance of Latvian state authorities to resolve the problems which lesbians and gay men face and to prohibit and tackle discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation."

NEW ZEALAND

Prime Minister Jenny Shipley became the first head of state to attend the country's large annual gay and lesbian parade Feb. 21.

The parade attracted extra attention this year after the Auckland City Council refused to provide its customary funding for the event.

Auckland Deputy Mayor David Hay said Shipley's appearance "sends out very negative signals to the young people of New Zealand.... It's obvious she's doing it to endorse their [gay] lifestyle and their behavior."

The prime minister's spokesperson called her attendance "no big deal."

Despite the rain, about 100,000 people attended this year's festivities.

PANAMA

Gay men and lesbians in Panama have launched their own political party, reports Agence-France Presse.

The Association of Panamanian Homosexuals said it represents 75,000 citizens and has "the numbers necessary to constitute a powerful political force to compete against the [ruling] Democratic Revolutionary Party and the [opposition] Arnulfista Party."

ROMANIA

Amnesty International is urging activists to send letters and nonperishable food to Romanian Mariana Cetiner, who is serving a three-year prison sentence for asking another woman to have sex with her.

Amnesty believes the letters will focus Romanian authorities' attention on the case. President Emil Constantinescu recently promised foreign activists he will pardon all gay men and lesbians jailed under the nation's anti-gay laws, but according to Amnesty, the process has not yet begun.

Romanian law bans gay sex between consenting adults "if the act was committed in public or has produced public scandal."

It is also illegal "to entice or seduce a person to practice same-sex acts, as well as to form propaganda associations, or to engage in other forms of proselytizing with the same aim." The penalty is one to five years in prison.

Write Mariana Cetiner, Penitenciarul Aiud, Judetul Alba, Romania.

Appeals calling for the release of all Romanians jailed for consensual gay sex—and for repeal of the laws under which they were convicted—should be sent to President Constantinescu, Excelenti Sale, Presedintele Romaniei, Palatul Cotroceni, Bd. Geiuli 1, 76238 Bucuresti, Romania.

Compiled by REX WOCKNER

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