



**INTERNATIONAL**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approved a sweeping series of recommendations in support of gay and lesbian equality Sept. 26.

The assembly, which is composed of members of parliament from 41 European nations, called upon European governments to, among other things, ban sexual-orientation discrimination in their national legislation; revoke all laws that criminalize gay sex between consenting adults; release anyone imprisoned for homosexual acts between consenting adults; apply the same age-of-consent laws to homosexual and heterosexual acts; fight homophobia in schools, the medical profession, the armed forces and police forces; and enact registered-partnership legislation.

"This is a great development," said Nico Beger, an International Lesbian and Gay Association delegate to the Council of Europe. "The recommendations were carried by a majority of 77 percent. Although the vote is not binding on national governments, it represents a most powerful statement of democratic opinion across Europe and as such will help influence the development of government policies across the continent."

Founded after World War II, the council aims to strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law in its 41 member states. The European Convention on Human Rights is the most important of its many human rights treaties.

Violations of the convention are settled by the European Court of Human Rights. The council is governed by the foreign ministers of its member states (Committee of Ministers) and by representatives from national parliaments (Parliamentary Assembly).

**NEW ZEALAND**

A New Zealand Court of Appeal ruled this month that the Film and Literature Board of Review erred in banning importation of two anti-gay videos from the United States. *AIDS: What You Haven't Been Told* and *Gay Rights/Special Rights: Inside the Homosexual Agenda* were prohibited because they were riddled with misinformation and used deceptive editing and propaganda to spark fears of a gay conspiracy.

They also depicted gays and people with AIDS as "inherently inferior," the board said. The appeal judges determined the videos do not depict sex in a way that is injurious to the

public good and therefore should not have been banned.

New rules from New Zealand's Health Funding Authority permit lesbian couples and single women to access state-funded fertility treatments. In the past, such women often had to pay the \$900-a-cycle fee themselves because of regional inconsistencies in eligibility criteria.

**AUSTRALIA**

Western Australia's parliament voted last month not to pay a pension to the partner of openly lesbian member Giz Watson in the event of her death.

"I thought I was demystifying it [homosexuality] a bit for them," Watson told *The Australian* newspaper. "I don't bring it up often, and I argue more passionately about saving a bit of bush than this stuff. In some respects I've almost gone out of my way to be accommodating of their views, because if you want tolerance you also have to display it. But obviously it hasn't had enough influence. Maybe I've been too nice."

**MALAYSIA**

A total of 111 Malaysian men were arrested by the Islamic Affairs Department's morality police for "attempting to commit homosexual acts" last year in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city.

"Homosexuality is forbidden in Islam," Abdul Kadir Che Kob, the department's head of education and research, told *TIME Asia*. "It is a crime worse than murder. They are shameless people.... How can men have sex with men? God did not make them this way. This is all Western influence."

A total of 50 morality officers work for the department. They are permitted to arrest only Muslims and spring into action only after receiving a complaint.

"Usually, people give us precise information like where these men are," Abdul Kadir said. "We then go to the place, say, a hotel room. We knock and force them to open the door, but they are usually fully clothed by then. We still charge them for attempting to commit homosexual acts."

"We charge them in court [and] put them through what we call Islamic counseling sessions," he said. "They recite the Koran every day, and we will tell them they have committed a grave sin." **JT**



Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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