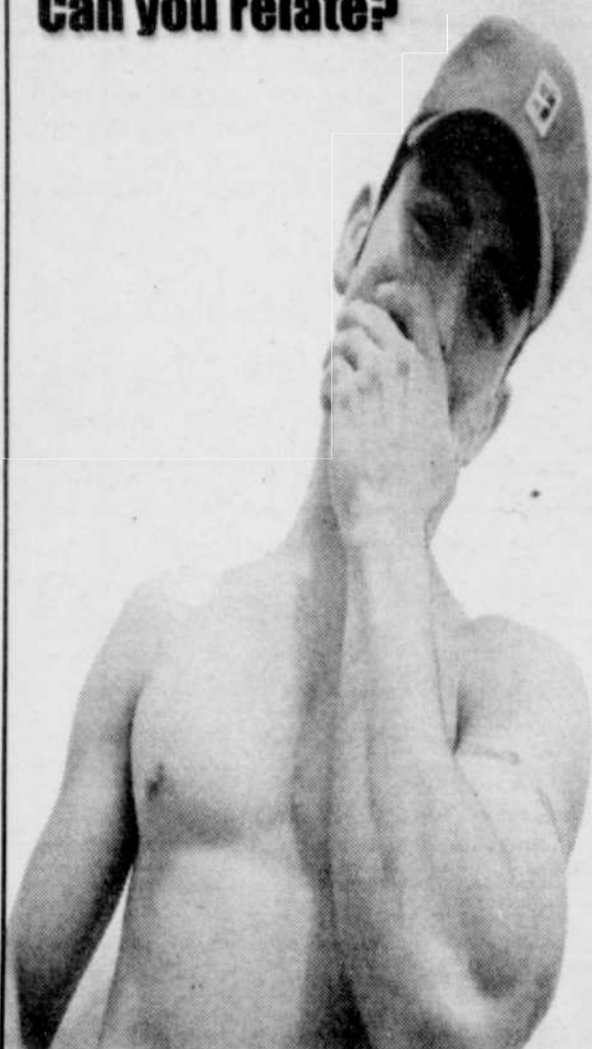


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WORLD news

EGYPT

More than 6,000 Frenchmen, including many celebrities, signed an open letter to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak protesting his government's crackdown on gays. The correspondence was handed over to the Egyptian Embassy on Feb. 8 in Paris by composer Jean-Michel Jarre, just ahead of the leader's arrival in the city.

Among the celebrity signers were actress Catherine Deneuve, former Manchester United football star Eric Cantona and director Frederic Mitterrand, nephew of the late President François Mitterrand, according to Agence France-Presse. Egyptian authorities have been on the rampage against gays for several months, and more than 40 men have been sent to prison for up to five years.

Most recently, a court in Boulak-al-Dakrou near Cairo convicted four men Feb. 3 of consensual homosexual behavior ("the habitual practice of debauchery") and jailed them for three years.

During a Feb. 9 meeting with Mubarak, French President Jacques Chirac expressed "concern" about the crackdown and asked him whether releasing the men from prison would be possible. "In the name of the defense of freedoms and the avowal of all forms of discrimination, the president expressed his deep emotion and worry," his press secretary said.

Meanwhile, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission has denounced the governments of the United States and the European Union nations for ignoring the crackdown. "As the arrests and draconian convictions of alleged homosexuals in Egypt intensify, IGLHRC [calls upon] the Bush administration and the European Union to pressure Egypt's government to end the campaign of persecution and to release the men now in prison," the group said.

CANADA

Gay couples now have to file joint tax returns if they've lived and slept together for at least a year.

The Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act was passed in 2000 and came into full effect for the 2001 tax year. According to Xtra!, couples who fail to declare their relationship can be reassessed and ordered to pay back taxes and benefits along with interest.

Toronto's Glad Day Bookshop has lost its challenge to the province of Ontario's mandatory film review process.

The gay-themed store argued that the \$2.65-per-minute fee for approving movies effectively bans smaller projects whose importers cannot justify the expense based on anticipated video sales. Owner John Scythes called the requirement an unconstitutional violation of freedom of expression.

But Ontario Court of Justice Judge Bruce Young convicted Glad Day of selling a video lacking an Ontario Film Review Board approval sticker, saying it had no right to challenge a process it had refused to participate in. The store could be fined up to \$62,800.

Scythes plans to appeal. "We thought the judge would at least look at the fee structure," he told Xtra!

UNITED KINGDOM

An American Airlines flight from London to New York City was escorted to the airport by U.S. military fighter jets Feb. 8 after passengers became alarmed by two men who went to the bathroom together four or five times.

The suspects, who were not named, later told



Catherine Deneuve (right, with fellow queer icon David Bowie in 1983's *The Hunger*) has come to the defense of persecuted Egyptians

officials they were smoking crack and having sex in the toilet. They were not charged with a crime, because no drugs were found, but were deported back to England.

Britain is set to repeal several laws targeting gay men, the *Independent* reported.

Statutes will be dumped banning "gross indecency" between men, "soliciting for an immoral purpose" and "buggery." Oscar Wilde was prosecuted under the gross indecency statute, which prohibits men from, among other things, kissing each other in public.



Oscar Wilde

POLAND

The government unveiled gay partnership legislation Feb. 14. "We must adapt our law to the...European Union, where it is illegal to discriminate against people of different sexual orientations," said Parliament member Joanna Sosnowska, the bill's author.

Gay advocate Marcin Laskowski called the proposal a "first step in the right direction." But fellow activist Slawek Starosta said he doubts the bill will make it through Parliament.

A spokesman for the nation's Catholic hierarchy called the measure "an attack against...marriage and the family." Poland is 90 percent Roman Catholic and hopes to join the 15-member European Union in 2003.

Meanwhile, Warsaw has seen an explosion of commercial gay life in recent months, with five new clubs opening. The city also has two older establishments.

SWEDEN

The government has introduced legislation extending adoption rights to gay couples.

Registered gay couples already have nearly every other marriage right in Sweden. "Many children are already growing up in homosexual families, and this is about their rights," Social Democratic Parliament member Marianne Carlstrom told a press conference.

The proposal should see a parliamentary vote before July and become law next year. Sweden's gay registered partnership law came into force Jan. 1, 1995, following in the footsteps of Denmark in 1989 and Norway in 1993.

ROMANIA

After years of pressure from the European Union, Romania fully legalized gay sex Feb. 2. It also enacted a law banning discrimi-