

WORLDnews

UNITED KINGDOM

Gays in Derry, Northern Ireland, were warned Jan. 10 to be cautious when leaving gay clubs following a jump in anti-gay assaults and intimidation, the *Derry Journal* reported.

"There has been a marked increase in the number of homophobic attacks in the city," said David McCartney, Rainbow Project director. "Although we do not believe that the attacks are being perpetrated by an organized gang, we are worried for the safety of the gay community walking through the Strand Road and Foyle Street late at night."

McCartney said the problem is exacerbated by the fact that victims of such crimes often are reluctant to report them to authorities. Police Service of Northern Ireland Sgt. Harry Faulkner assured the community that anti-gay attacks will "be investigated in a professional, sensitive and confidential manner."

Gay men who were convicted of having sex with 16- or 17-year-olds before Britain reduced the gay age of consent in 2000 will not be removed from the nation's Sex Offenders Register, Home Secretary David Blunkett has decided, according to the Jan. 10 issue of the *Pink Paper*.

"We do not impose new legislation retrospectively," a Home Office spokeswoman affirmed. "Having sex with a man under 18 was still judged to be a crime at that point in time. To declare an amnesty would have major implications for criminal records and recompense, not just in this case but for other crimes."

One of Britain's most promising pianists is being sent back to Zimbabwe after his application for asylum was rejected by the Home Office, *The Observer* reported Jan. 5.

Michael Brownlee Walker, who is gay and the great-grandson of one of Zimbabwe's earliest white settlers, fears he will be harassed or detained because of his name and because he has attended protests in Britain organized by the Zimbabwean opposition group Movement for Democratic Change. His family's property—along with that of other Zimbabwean whites—recently was confiscated, and his parents and brother fled the country.

"I have no family there now," he told *The Observer*. "They were all advised to evacuate because it was so dangerous. They had started to kill farmers, including people we knew."

The 25-year-old also fears he will be victimized because of his sexuality. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has said gays are "repugnant to my human conscience...immoral and repulsive."

Brownlee Walker said organized anti-gay violence is common in Zimbabwe, although news of such incidents rarely makes it into the international media.

"Victimization of the gay community is universal and constant in Zimbabwe," affirmed Peter Tatchell, a British gay activist and longtime Mugabe foe. "No one is safe."

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government Jan. 7 announced its support for repeal of the infamous Section 28, which prohibits spending public money to promote homosexuality and bars schools from teaching the "acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."

Local Government Minister Nick Raynsford told the House of Commons the 1998 law is "unnecessary and undesirable" and "gives considerable offense to many people whose lifestyle is stigmatized" by it. The Scottish Parliament repealed the U.K.-wide law June 21, 2000.



Nick Raynsford

SWEDEN

A Swedish woman who had unprotected sex with three men without telling them she was HIV-positive was sent to jail for a year and fined \$13,800 Jan. 4. None of the men caught HIV.

Members of ACT UP/Paris threw red dye and paint-filled condoms at the Swedish Embassy in France to protest the sentence Jan. 15. "AIDS is a disease, not a weapon," the demonstrators said.

VATICAN CITY

Sex-change operations do not alter a person's gender, the Vatican has declared, according to a Jan. 14 report on *CathNews.com*.

The Vatican document—which first was sent secretly to papal representatives, then later to the president of each nation's bishops conference—instructs bishops and priests to never change a Catholic's gender on his or her baptismal record. Transsexuals never can get married, be ordained to the priesthood or enter a religious order based on their post-surgery gender, the church's doctrinal congregation ruled.

INTERNATIONAL

The second European Bisexual Conference will be in Dublin, Ireland, from July 4 to 6, which is Pride weekend.

The gathering "will be a place to exchange information and experience in the areas of freedom of sexual preference and the position of bisexuality within societies across Europe and also aims to improve bisexual visibility at the European level," organizers said.

The European Parliament has urged the 15 nations of the European Union to grant all spousal rights to nonmarried cohabiting couples—gay and straight.

The nonbinding amendment to a human rights report passed Jan. 17 by a narrow margin—277-269 with 14 abstentions. An amendment supporting full marriage for same-sex couples failed.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled Jan. 9 that nations cannot have different ages of consent for gay and straight sex.

The decision came in three cases challenging Article 209 of Austria's penal code, which allowed heterosexual and lesbian sex at age 14 but prohibited gay male sex prior to age 19. Although Austria's Constitutional Court struck down the law last year, the Euro ruling sets a precedent that also applies to the 43 other nations that make up the Council of Europe.

"These judgments mean there is no longer any excuse for those Council of Europe member states which still have discriminatory age-of-consent laws—Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland and Portugal," said Nico Bejer, spokesman for the International Lesbian and Gay Association's European regional branch. "We call on them to honor their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and repeal these laws immediately."

The Euro court said the Austrian measure breached Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees Council of Europe citizens freedom from discrimination.

ARMENIA

The former Soviet republic of Armenia legalized gays Jan. 9. The National Assembly repealed criminal code Article 116, which punished sex between males with up to five years in prison.

At least 15 men had been jailed in recent years for the crime of consensual adult sex. The

law change likely was related to the Council of Europe's demand that countries hoping to join the 44-nation organization decriminalize homosexuality.

CANADA

A high schooler in North Vancouver who was the victim of repeated anti-gay torment at the hands of his classmates did not suffer discrimination based on sexual orientation because he's not gay, the British Columbia Supreme Court ruled Jan. 6. A British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal had come to the opposite conclusion, saying the school district discriminated against him based on his perceived sexuality when it failed to stop students from harassing him at Handsworth Secondary School from 1993 to 1998.

Principal Terry Shaw admitted that Azmi Jubran had been severely harassed but said it was impossible for 70 teachers to fully police 1,300 students. The attacks included one in which a homophobe set the student's shirt on fire, according to *The Vancouver Sun*.



The city of Barcelona recently honored longtime Spanish gay activist Jordi Petit (right, with Amnesty International Secretary General Pierre Sane)

SPAIN

Longtime Spanish gay activist and former International Lesbian and Gay Association Secretary General Jordi Petit has received the city of Barcelona's Medal of Honor. It was presented Jan. 22 by Mayor Joan Clos.

"I am very honored, and I understand that Barcelona is recognizing not only my person's work but all homosexual volunteerism," Petit said. "This medal is for the thousands of gays and lesbians who have fought for their rights and against AIDS these past 25 years."

GERMANY

The mayor of Bad Alexandersbad refused Jan. 8 to meet the same-sex couple from the first gay episode of the usually heterosexual *Blind Date* television series. He had agreed to play host to a *Blind Date* couple nine months ago.



But when Markus Stork, 31, and his date, Patrick Schaefer, 25, Walter Lehner arrived in the Bavarian spa town on the *Blind Date* helicopter, Mayor Walter Lehner balked, saying he had offered to meet a "normal couple" and didn't want the town to get a gay reputation. *Blind Date* host Joerg Pilawa said he was shocked at Lehner's bigotry and urged gays to boycott Bad Alexandersbad. [E]

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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