



U.S. Rep. Barney Frank is putting increased pressure on Egypt to stop persecuting gays

**EGYPT**

Gay U.S. Rep. Barney Frank is stepping up his campaign against Egypt's recent treatment of gays. Citing a "sustained, blatant and increasingly brutal crackdown against gay men," he urged organizations April 14 to start lobbying Congress against the Arab nation.

Frank also accused Egypt's U.S. ambassador, Nabil Fahmy, of lying last year when he said the nation was not persecuting gay men. "His fundamental dishonesty is now evident," the Massachusetts Democrat wrote in a letter.

A total of 21 men who were arrested in a bar raid and in other anti-gay sweeps were sent to prison March 15 for three years for the crime of "habitual debauchery." Numerous other men have faced the same fate in the past 20 months—many after being entrapped on the Internet by police officers pretending to be gay cruisers.

Frank said it would be impractical for gay groups to pressure Congress to end all aid to Egypt, "particularly that aid we provide annually to Egypt for the constructive role it played in the late '70s when it signed a peace treaty with Israel. But the Egyptian government has other goals it is seeking that require congressional approval, such as weapons sales, trade preferences and in other areas. Egypt must understand that it cannot continue to be so oppressive towards people's human rights and expect us to support these additional requests."

Amnesty International issued an urgent global appeal April 9 on behalf of an Egyptian man who was jailed for arranging to hook up with another man via the Gaydar Web site.

Wassim Tawfiq Abyad, 26, was convicted of "habitual debauchery" and sent to prison for 15 months. His Gaydar messages exchanged with a cop pretending to be a gay cruiser were used as evidence against him.

"Amnesty International is very concerned that the Egyptian authorities are pursuing a policy of Internet entrapment to persecute gay men," the organization said. It alerted all 1.6 million of its members to Wissam's case.

"It's shocking that a man has been locked up in Egypt for exactly the same kind of private communication taken for granted by thousands of men in the U.K.," said Nora Cranston, Amnesty's U.K. gay equality officer. "The Egyptian government must receive a clear message from people all over the world that persecution of people for their sexual orientation is unacceptable and that Internet entrapment is a clear violation of fundamental human rights."

In related news, the European Parliament called on Egyptian authorities April 10 to stop persecuting gays and to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. The resolution noted that the Association Agreement between Egypt and the European Union includes a human rights clause. Members of the European Parliament urged that the human rights situation in Egypt be placed on the agenda of their next meeting with Egyptian parliamentarians.

**BELGIUM**

The first same-sex marriages in Belgium probably will take place June 16. Belgium is the second country, after the Netherlands, to let gays get

married just like straight people do, under the regular marriage laws.

The measure passed the House of Representatives on Jan. 30 by a vote of 91-22. Built-in delays—the king had to sign the law, it had to be "published," then a three-month waiting period began—place the law's starting date at June 1.

Then there is a 14-day waiting period between applying for a marriage license and being allowed to get married. June 15 is a Sunday, when city halls are closed, so activists expect the first marriages will be June 16.

"We try to organize the first marriages together with the gay- and lesbian-friendly City Council of the city of Brussels on the 16th of June early in the morning," said Anke Hintjens, spokesperson for Halebifederatie, a federation of 92 Flemish gay groups. "How early depends on the will of the mayor to get out of bed early."

The Belgian law change did not extend adoption rights to married gay couples, and foreign gays only will be permitted to marry in Belgium if same-sex marriage is legal in their home country. For the time being, that means Dutch gays are the only foreigners who can marry in Belgium. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, foreign gays can get married after a brief period of residency. **JW**

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.



Anke Hintjens predicts Belgium's first same-sex marriages will take place June 16

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