

INTERNATIONAL

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, joined other church leaders in opposing gay unions May 26, even though he personally favors them. The primates who head the denomination's 38 provinces took action at a meeting in Brazil in hopes of averting a schism in the church, which observers believe could be torn apart by the issue of gay equality.

"The question of public rites for the blessing of same-sex unions is still a cause of potentially divisive controversy," the bishops stated. "There is no theological consensus...therefore we, as a body, cannot support the authorization of such rites."

The bishop in Vancouver, British Columbia, shocked church conservatives recently by approving blessings of same-sex couples—and the first ceremony took place May 29. A few other bishops in North America reportedly have similar plans.

Williams reportedly supports the ceremonies and, as a bishop, ordained openly noncelibate gays. But amid intense criticism after his selection as archbishop last year, he promised to toe the anti-gay church line that was hammered out at a 1998 bishops conference.

Vancouver-area Bishop Michael Ingham feels no such compunction. He discussed the controversy before Michael Kalmuc and Kelley Montfort took their historic vows at St. Margaret's Cedar Cottage Church.

"This is not a marriage ceremony but a blessing of permanent and faithful commitments between persons of the same sex in order that they may have the support and encouragement of the church in their lives together under God," Ingham said. "The church recognizes that homosexual couples face the same challenges and share the same responsibilities as other people in living out the costly demands of love. Our purpose is to encourage and strengthen fidelity and mutual supportiveness in family life, on which the stability of our wider society depends."

The Anglican Communion includes the Church of England, the U.S. Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church of Canada and other national Anglican churches around the globe.



Latvians booed Russian lesbian pop duo t.A.T.u. when they kissed May 25 during the Eurovision Song Contest

RUSSIA

The Russian lesbian pop duo t.A.T.u. placed third May 25 in the Eurovision Song Contest despite oddsmakers' predictions that they would win the wildly popular pan-European competition. The contest was held in Latvia, which won last year.

As they often do, t.A.T.u.'s Lena Katina and Julia Volkova kissed during their performance, eliciting some boos from the largely Latvian audience. They sang "Don't Fear, Don't Ask" in Russian.

Turkey took home this year's trophy for Sertab Erener's "Every Way That I Can." Belgium's Urban Trad came in second.

The winner is decided by the contest's 160 million viewers, who telephone or text-message their votes. They cannot vote for their own country.

t.A.T.u.'s biggest hit, "All the Things She Said," hit No. 1 in several nations earlier this year. In the song's video, Katina and Volkova make out passionately.

The singers have said they plan to marry each other but still have sex with men as well. Russian journalists have claimed that the girls really are heterosexual and that their manager, Ivan Shapovalov, invented the lesbian shtick for commercial reasons.

UZBEKISTAN

Police in Uzbekistan, a former Soviet republic, arrested gay journalist and human rights activist Ruslan Sharipov on May 26 and charged him with committing homosexual acts, a violation of Article 120 of the criminal code.

Two of his colleagues also were taken into custody but have not been charged. Human Rights Watch said May 29 that Sharipov likely has been targeted because of his articles on police corruption and human rights abuses.

"Sharipov's long-standing history of criticizing government policy, combined with past harassment against him and his colleagues, raise strong suspicions that this is a politically motivated case," said Elizabeth Andersen, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division. "That the authorities would charge him with committing homosexual acts, violating his fundamental rights to nondiscrimination and privacy, makes it doubly egregious."

SLOVAKIA

Parliament passed a law forbidding employers from asking an employee his or her sexual orientation, *The Slovak Spectator* reported June 2.

Gay groups and European Union officials said they would continue to push for a total ban on workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. Slovakia is scheduled to join the EU in May 2004.

"It is progress, but it is not enough," said Onno Simons of the European Commission's Bratislava delegation. "The EC definitely looks forward to [Slovakia approving] an anti-discrimination law."

JAPAN

Japanese transsexuals who have sex-change operations cannot switch their gender in their family register, the Supreme Court ruled June 2.

The register determines one's fundamental legal identity in Japanese society. According to *The Mainichi Daily News*, the plaintiff, a female-to-male transsexual, argued that without the change he would be unable to get a job or get married, which violates his constitutional right to pursuit of happiness.

AUSTRALIA

The state of New South Wales, where Sydney is located, will set the age of consent for gay sex at 16, in line with the law for straight sex.

The Legislative Council voted 23-16 in favor of the change May 27, following a 54-32 vote in the lower house. New South Wales was the last Australian state with an unequal age of consent. **JN**

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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