



Justice Minister Irwin Cotler says the Canadian government still supports opening up full marriage to same-sex couples nationwide

Court of Canada on the matter, asking if the Constitution actually requires legalization of same-sex marriage, as the Ontario and British Columbia courts insisted.

The addition of the question may hint at federal equivocation on the issue, given that there has been informal talk of trying to enact a civil union law instead of opening up marriage. The addition of another question also has the effect of delaying the Supreme Court hearing on the matter until after this spring's election, granting breathing room to politicians who would rather not defend gay marriage during a campaign season.

However, Justice Minister Irwin Cotler confirmed that the government still supports opening up full marriage to same-sex couples nationwide. He said the question was added merely to be sensitive to the concerns of Canadians who believe the Supreme Court should weigh in on a matter of such profound social change. The three questions that were submitted earlier did not specifically ask the Supreme Court if it agreed with the provincial courts' determinations.

The Netherlands and Belgium also let same-sex couples marry under the ordinary marriage laws. Numerous other nations unite gay couples via civil union or domestic partnership laws.

INTERNATIONAL

The United Nations extended benefits Jan. 29 to employees' same-sex spouses and registered domestic partners.

The change came in the form of an administrative order from Secretary-General Kofi Annan. When an employee applies for the benefits, the United Nations will seek an OK from the government of the worker's home nation "to confirm the existence and validity of the domestic partnership contracted by the staff member under the law of that country."

Same-sex marriage is permitted in the Netherlands, Belgium and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia and Ontario. Domestic partnerships or civil unions are available in Denmark/Greenland, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the U.S. states of California, Hawaii, New Jersey and Vermont. Gay couples also have access to some spousal rights in Australia, Austria, Hungary, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

It is unclear what the U.S. government's response would be to an inquiry regarding a U.N. employee from a state that offers civil unions or domestic partnerships. Marriage and marriage-like unions are regulated individually by the 50 states.

It is also unknown what determination would be made when citizens of a country that does not offer same-sex unions get married in Canada. Foreigners can arrive in British Columbia or Ontario, buy a license and get married the same day.

UNITED KINGDOM

The Office for National Statistics has reported that 78,522 people in England and Wales told census-takers they are part of a cohabiting gay couple.

According to PA News, Brighton and Hove has the highest percentage of partnered gays at 1.29 percent of the population. The next highest numbers are all in London—in the city of London, Islington, Lambeth, Tower Hamlets, Camden, Hackney, Southwark, Westminster and Haringey.

AUSTRALIA

Two men from Melbourne, married in the Canadian province of Ontario, where same-sex marriage is legal and open to foreigners, plan to demand that Australia recognize their marriage, *The Age* reported Feb. 4. Jason McCheyne, 33, and Adrian Tuazon, 30, will take their fight to the Family Court.

"We see marriage as a lifetime commitment, just like everyone else," McCheyne told the newspaper. "We are a family now. We are very traditional in that sense."

Although hundreds of American same-sex couples also have gotten married in Ontario—and in British Columbia, where same-sex marriage also was legalized by court order last year—no similar court challenges have been launched in the United States.

A total of 40 cops from the state of Victoria received pay to march in Melbourne's Gay Pride parade Feb. 1. A report in *The Herald Sun* said the officers "drew some of the loudest cheers."

"It's to show our support for our gay members and everyone else in the community," acting Cmdr. Sandra Langlands said. "I couldn't believe the deafening cheers that we got—it's magnificent."

SOUTH KOREA

The South Korean government said Feb. 4 it will remove homosexuality from its list of unacceptable sexual acts that harm teen-agers. The list—which also includes incest, bestiality, prostitution and sadism—is used for censoring movies, books and Web sites, among other purposes.

The law change is expected to take effect in a few months' time, following public hearings and passage by the National Assembly. "We revised the bill because the United Nations and National Human Rights Commission of Korea, among others, said that we shouldn't violate the human rights of homosexual minors in society," Lee Ju-hyun, director of the government's Commission on Youth Protection, told the *JoongAng Daily* newspaper.

BELGIUM

Gays from other nations can now get married in Belgium as long as one of the individuals lives there or visits regularly.

Previously, same-sex marriage had been open only to Belgians and people from nations that also allow same-sex marriage, namely the Netherlands and two provinces of Canada. The change took effect Feb. 6.

The Netherlands' marriage laws are similar to Belgium's. In the Canadian provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, however, foreign same-sex couples can arrive from abroad, buy a license, get married the same day and go back home.

Belgium's Center for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism will sue Roman Catholic Cardinal Gustaaf Joos for telling a magazine that gays are perverts. It said his remarks are illegal under the nation's anti-discrimination laws.

"All those who say they are lesbian or gay, a maximum of 5 to 10 percent are effectively les-

bian or gay," Joos, 80, told *P-magazine* Jan. 21. "All the rest are simply sexual perverts. Don't hesitate to write that down. I demand you write that down. I don't care if they all come and protest at my door. I won't open the door."

CZECH REPUBLIC

A gay registered partnership bill was withdrawn from the Cabinet's agenda Jan. 28, the Czech News Agency reported. The measure had been put forward by the justice and interior ministers.

A Justice Ministry spokeswoman said she was perplexed by the news, given that the government's Legislation Council had only "formal," not "factual," objections to the bill. No official explanation for the development was forthcoming, but Gay and Lesbian League activist Petr Zaloudek said that there was merely a "technical" problem and that the measure will return to the agenda soon.

THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines' House of Representatives last month passed a bill banning discrimination against gay, lesbian, bi and trans people and sent the measure to the Senate.

About 30 gay activists spent the day lobbying senators Jan. 27, INQ7.net reported. They charged the measure is languishing in the Senate's youth and family relations committee.

The proposed law prohibits anti-queer discrimination by employers, the police, the military, schools, public services and commercial establishments. It also bans forced psychiatric tests aimed at determining or changing someone's sexual orientation.

THE VATICAN

Pope John Paul II said Jan. 24 that the media are harming society with positive depictions of gay people. The pontiff called for governmental regulation to protect the family from media assault.

"The family and family life are all too often inadequately portrayed in the media," he said. "Infidelity, sexual activity outside of marriage, and the absence of a moral and spiritual vision of the marriage covenant are depicted uncritically, while positive support is at times given to divorce, contraception, abortion and homosexuality. Such portrayals, by promoting causes inimical to marriage and the family, are detrimental to the common good of society." □

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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