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## WORLD news

### THE NETHERLANDS

More than 3,900 same-sex couples have gotten married in the Netherlands since it became the first nation to open up ordinary marriage April 1, 2001. About 2,400 weddings took place in 2001 and 1,500 in 2002, the latest year for which statistics were reported.

Full marriage also is available to same-sex couples in Belgium and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. In Canada, foreign queer couples can arrive, buy a license and get married the same day. The Netherlands and Belgium have residency requirements.

Marriage-like civil unions are offered in Denmark/Greenland, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; in the U.S. states of California, Hawaii, New Jersey and Vermont; and in the Canadian province of Quebec. Several other nations extend some spousal rights to same-sex couples.



Do you really want to hurt me? Boy George (left, with *Taboo* producer Rosie O'Donnell) landed himself in court after assaulting a London nightclub employee.

Gay cops from around Europe will meet and network Aug. 5 and 6 in the Netherlands. The symposium is being organized by the Dutch National Police's National Expertise Center for Diversity and the Amsterdam-Amstelland Police gay network.

"In a number of countries in which the Dutch police have been offering expert support in various areas, a need was identified for the exchange of knowledge and experience concerning gay emancipation within police organizations," organizers said. Topics will include same-sex marriage, religion and homosexuality, creation of a European gay police network and the status of queers in the nations that will join the European Union this year.

### EGYPT

The Egyptian government continues to arrest and torture men suspected of having gay sex, Human Rights Watch said March 1. According to the group's report *In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct*, the trial of 52 men in 2001 for "habitual practice of debauchery"—the charge used to criminalize gay sex—"was only the most visible point in the ongoing and expanding crackdown."

"Today, Egyptian police use wiretaps and a growing web of informers to conduct raids on private homes or seize suspects on the street," the organization said. "Undercover police agents arrange meetings with men through chat rooms and personal advertisements on the Internet—and then arrest them."

The 144-page report quotes arrestees saying they were tied up, suspended in painful positions, burned with cigarettes, submerged in icy water and subjected to electroshock on their limbs, tongues and penises. Other prisoners have been encouraged to rape the gay suspects, according to the report.

"They took telephone wire and wrapped it around my fingers, my toes, my ear, my penis," one victim said. "It was connected to a kind of telephone they cranked up by hand to produce the shocks, and it was like death."

Doctors participate in torturing suspected homosexuals under the guise of collecting forensic evidence to support the charge of habitual debauchery, Human Rights Watch added.

"Prosecutors refer suspects to the Forensic Medical Authority, an arm of Egypt's Ministry of Justice," the report said. "Doctors there compel the men to strip and kneel; they massage, dilate and in some cases penetrate the prisoners' anal cavities, subjecting them to intrusive, abusive and degrading examinations to 'prove' the men have committed homosexual acts."

### UNITED KINGDOM

Gay singer and disc jockey Boy George paid \$18,740 Feb. 25 to settle a libel suit filed by a London nightclub employee he had accused of assault.

He also apologized to Sweet Suite membership secretary Andrew Thompson for the accusation, which appeared in a newspaper column and magazine interview. George punched out Thompson on June 20, 2002, and later said Thompson had provoked him and deserved to be smacked.

Gay pop singer George Michael blasted British Prime Minister Tony Blair in the March 1 issue of the magazine *The Big Issue*.

"I can't imagine what it feels like for people who lost their kids [in the Iraq war] to hear Tony Blair's pathetic little bleatings that he still thinks the world is a safer place. It's disrespectful," Michael said. "I wish to God that the Labor Party had the guts to get rid of Blair, because it could survive another election without him. I think it's too important for world affairs that he's gone. I think globally he is a dangerous man. He is an altruist who thinks he's doing everything for the best, but he cannot face up to his own ego."

Michael caused controversy in 2002 with the video for his song "Shoot the Dog," which depicts President Bush as an imbecile and Blair as his poodle/boyfriend.



George Michael's "Shoot the Dog" video took aim at President Bush as well as British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife, Cherie