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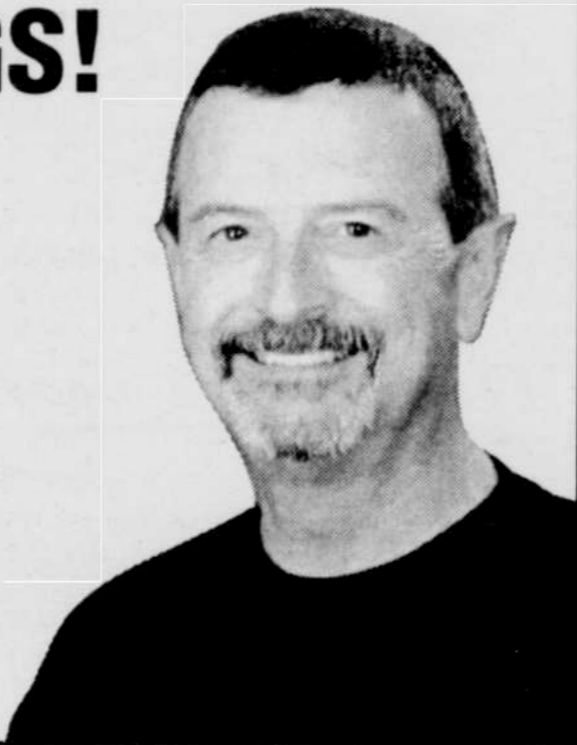
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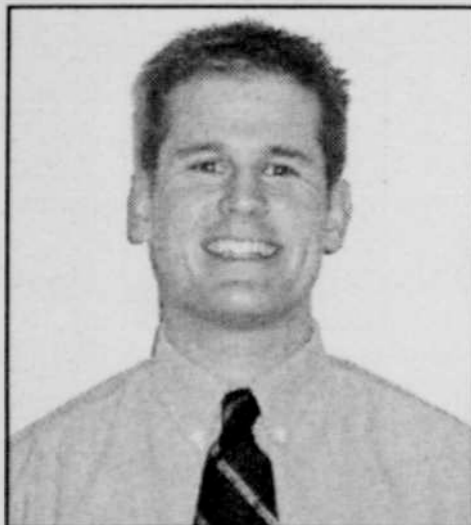
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WORLD news



Michael Cashman (left) and Kursad Kahramanoglu blame Vatican and Islamic arm-twisting for the delay of a U.N. gay rights resolution

INTERNATIONAL

A groundbreaking resolution on gay rights was scuttled again this year March 29 at the 60th session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Sponsored by Brazil, the resolution "expresses deep concern at the occurrence of violations of human rights in the world against persons on the grounds of their sexual orientation" and "calls upon all states to promote and protect the human rights of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation." Brazil opted to withdraw the measure before it came up for a vote, saying Muslim nations and the Vatican had enough clout to defeat it.

At last year's session, the vote was postponed for a year because of opposition from Muslim, African and Latin American countries, Vatican City, China and India. The United States had been expected to abstain.

"Millions of people across the globe face imprisonment, torture, violence and discrimination because of their sexual orientation," Member of the European Parliament Michael Cashman said after Brazil's backdown. "It's depressing when religions can succeed in denying ordinary men and women their universal human rights. Both the Vatican and the conference of Islamic states should hang their heads in shame for having reduced their beliefs to the gutter of bigotry and discrimination."

A statement released by several gay and gay-friendly nongovernmental organizations attending the session expressed "disappointment."

"Around the world, [queers] face serious human rights abuses on a daily basis," the groups said. "For years, special rapporteurs have noted instances of death, electroshock therapy, flogging, torture, multiple rapes and other egregious rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This resolution is urgently needed to send a clear message that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people are not less than human and that our rights cannot be violated with impunity."

Kursad Kahramanoglu, International Lesbian and Gay Association co-secretary general, voiced dismay at what he called Vatican and Islamic arm-twisting.

"This unprincipled alliance of the Vatican and Organization of the Islamic Conference in the U.N. has already twisted the arms of many countries to almost the breaking point in the past," he said. "The lukewarm support from some of the traditional supporters of LGBT rights has also contributed to the feeling of isolation of the Brazilian government."

UNITED KINGDOM

Gay couples in England and Wales will gain a long list of marital rights by registering their relationship if the government's Civil Partnership Bill, unveiled March 31, becomes law. Spousal rights and obligations would be extended in areas such as immigration, benefits, pensions, inheritance, property and tenancy rights, parental responsibility, court testimony, hospital visitation and accident compensation.

Some gay activists have denounced the bill, arguing that same-sex couples should have

access to ordinary marriage and the additional rights that come with it. "Lesbian and gay couples are being fobbed off with second-best partnership rights," the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association said.

Spokesperson Terry Sanderson asked: "Why are gay couples required to sign a different register to everyone else? Why is the government inventing a whole new structure of partnership registration when there is a perfectly good one in place already—called marriage? The government makes great play about its efforts to give equality to gay people, yet it has gone to enormous lengths to avoid giving equality."

RUSSIA

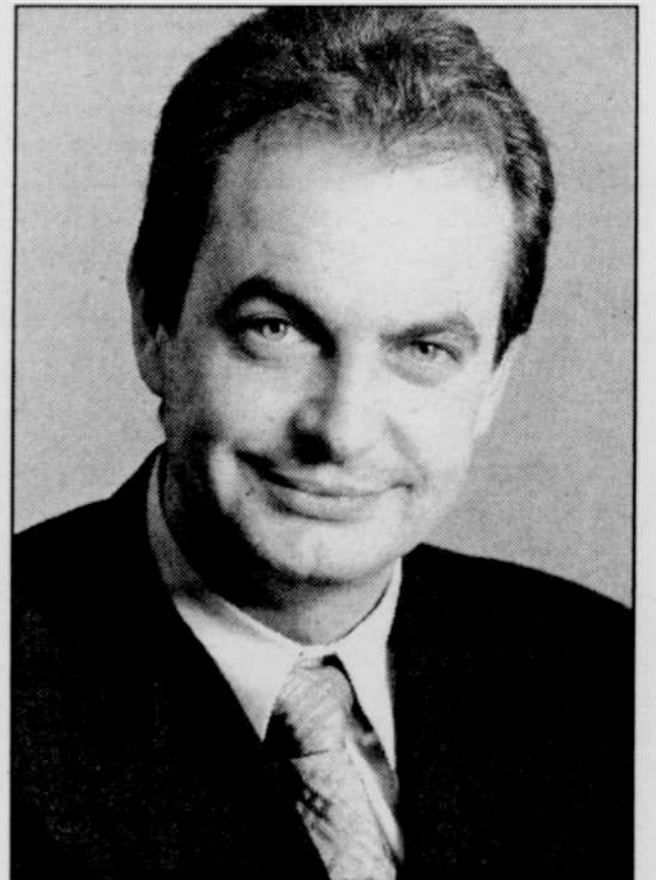
A committee of the lower house of Russia's Parliament, the State Duma, rejected a measure to recriminalize gay sex April 1.

Russia decriminalized homosexuality in 1992 shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union. Legislators said the proposed ban would have been unconstitutional because the Russian Constitution guarantees the inviolability of private life and private and family secrets, according to a report from the Interfax wire service.

ECUADOR

Ecuadorian gay activist Patricio Ordóñez Maico was knifed in the chest and back March 12 in the Quito office of the gay group Friends for Life Foundation by a person who shouted, "I'm going to kill you, you son of a bitch."

The attack happened a week after Ordóñez spoke at an international human rights meeting about a complaint he has filed against National Police officers who allegedly assaulted, sexually abused and threatened to kill him. Amnesty International urged its supporters March 19 to appeal for Ordóñez' protection.



Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero says Spain will extend marital rights to same-sex couples

SPAIN

Spain's new Socialist prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said March 18 that the nation will give same-sex couples all the rights of marriage.

"We are going to present a bill to set gay unions on the same footing as marriage," he told Telecinco TV. "From a semantic point of view, marriage may be a concept that does not cover this type of union, but it will have the same legal effects."