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WORLD news

AMERICAS

RIO GAYS PROTEST FUNDING FOR EX-GAY PROGRAMS

Hundreds of queers protested Dec. 7 outside the Rio de Janeiro state Legislative Assembly against a proposal to fund programs designed to turn gays straight, Britain's *The Independent* reported.

The plan was drafted by legislator Edino Fonseca, a fundamentalist Christian.

"There exist people who want a new direction—an exit from homosexuality to heterosexuality," he said. "Those who opt for this don't have any support."

Rio is considered to be one of South America's gay-friendliest cities, but activists say fundamentalist Christians have increased their numbers and strength in recent years. The city bans anti-gay discrimination and recognizes same-sex partnerships, *The Independent* reported.

NEWFOUNDLAND LEGALIZES SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Another Canadian province legalized same-sex marriage Dec. 21. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador joins British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and the Yukon Territory in granting gay couples full access to the institution.

Two lesbian couples had sued for the right to marry, and the Newfoundland Supreme Court declared, as courts had elsewhere, that the federal man-woman definition of marriage violates Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Plaintiffs Jacqueline Pottle and Noelle French wasted no time in tying the knot. They walked from the courthouse to the vital statistics office in the Government Services Center, acquired their marriage license and got hitched two days later.

"I'm sure there will be some legal and social benefits. But for us, it's about that next level of commitment—that lifetime commitment we can now make in front of our families and our friends," Pottle told a group of journalists.

The mayor of Gander, Newfoundland, refuses to be part of this historical occasion.

"It's not right for two people of the same sex to be married, and I will refuse to do any same-sex marriages," Mayor Claude Elliott told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

The federal government plans to pass legislation this month to extend same-sex marriage to the jurisdictions where it is not yet allowed: Alberta, New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Prince Edward Island.

Canada has no residency requirements for marriage, and foreign couples can buy a license and marry the same day—except in Quebec, where there is a 20-day waiting period.

COURT CLEARS PATH FOR NATIONWIDE LEGISLATION

Asked for its thoughts on the matter by the federal government, Canada's Supreme Court declared unanimously Dec. 9 that there are no obstacles to nationwide legalization of full same-sex civil marriage.

"Several centuries ago it would have been understood that marriage should be available only to opposite-sex couples," the court wrote. "The recognition of same-sex marriage in several Canadian jurisdictions as well as two European countries belies the assertion that the same is true today.... Our constitution is a liv-

ing tree which, by way of progressive interpretation, accommodates and addresses the realities of modern life."

In response to the ruling, the government said it will introduce a same-sex marriage bill in Parliament promptly. It is expected that the measure will pass.

As the Canadian government prepares to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide, court cases continue in some of the three provinces and two territories where same-sex couples still cannot marry.

ASIA/PACIFIC

NORTH KOREA REPORTS ZERO HIV CASES, CLAIMS IT HAS NO GAYS

North Korea said in December that it still has no HIV or AIDS cases—and doesn't have any homosexuals, either.

But the secretive, isolated nation did say that 27 foreign workers who tested HIV-positive were sent home at their own requests.

"The DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] is the sole country on the earth that has no AIDS-related patient so far," said Han Kyong Ho, director of the Ministry of Health's Central Hygienic and Anti-Epidemic Center, in an interview with the *Pyongyang Times* newspaper.

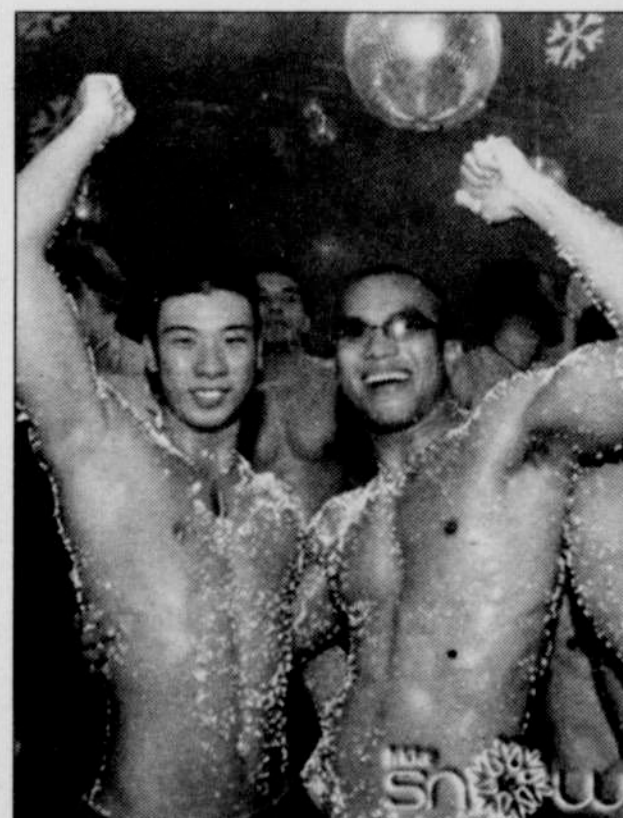
"As a medical worker I feel sure that there will not occur a case in the DPRK in the future, either," Han said. "The DPRK...encourages the population to have a noble viewpoint towards love, marriage and family, and observe a sound lifestyle. The country has neither licensed and private prostitutes nor homosexuals and drug addicts." Han said "socialist morality" will keep AIDS at bay.

"The socialist system in the country has nothing to do with any socioeconomic background giving rise to all descriptions of immorality and depravity," he told the *Times*. "The sound lifestyle prevailing in the society will be upgraded more and more as the people's standard of ideology and culture is on the rise and education on the socialist morality develops. It is crystal clear that AIDS can never penetrate into this environment."

It is not possible to independently verify "news" from North Korea. The nation is notorious for its inadvertently humorous propaganda, and it maintains strict controls on the movement of foreigners within its territory, journalists included.

SINGAPORE BANS GAY PARTY

Singapore's police department and Home Affairs Ministry banned a gay circuit party called SnowBall.04, saying it would be "unacceptable to the large majority of Singapore-



Revelers at SnowBall.03