

find politicians prepared to stand up to religious homophobia of this sort and take practical steps to curb it."

SPANISH PRIME MINISTER BLASTS BISHOPS

Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero defended the nation's recently passed law allowing full same-sex marriage May 11 and took a swipe at the Spanish Bishops' Conference for opposing it.

The bishops have called on Spanish Catholics, including those who work in government, to commit civil disobedience by refusing to implement the law.

"I will never understand those who proclaim love as the foundation of life, while denying so radically protection, understanding and affection to our neighbors, our friends, our relatives, our colleagues," Zapatero said in his State of the Nation address to Parliament. "What kind of love is this that excludes those who experience their sexuality in a different way?"

The same-sex marriage law is expected to come into force by this autumn.



José Luis Rodríguez

BELGIANS POLL PRO-GAY

Only 19 percent of Belgians think the nation is too tolerant of homosexuals, a poll has found.

Belgium is one of four nations in the world where gays and lesbians have access to full marriage.

Among people older than 65, the figure rises to 39 percent seeing too much tolerance.

Differences also emerged between French- and Flemish-speaking residents. About 44 percent of Flemish Belgians support allowing gay couples to adopt children compared with 28 percent of French speakers.

The poll was conducted by the Flemish-language daily newspaper *De Morgen*, which published the results in its May 11 issue.

GAY MAN WINS

POWERLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIP

Out gay man Chris Morgan won the British Championship Final in powerlifting May 8, lifting 533.5 pounds. He moves on to the European and world championships.

"My aim going into the British final was solely to qualify for the European and world championships," Morgan told OutSports.com. "I'm delighted to have become British champion in the process and am now looking forward to representing England once again at international level."

Morgan also holds a silver medal from the World Drug-Free Powerlifting Championship and numerous Gay Games medals, according to UK.Gay.com.

John Jolliff, 75, and Des Smith, 65, tied the knot in the city council chambers May 1 before 200 of their friends and family members after arriving in a silver Rolls-Royce and being welcomed by an honor guard carrying 17 huge rainbow flags, *The Dominion Post* reported.

Mayor Kerry Prendergast conducted the ceremony, pronouncing the couple "civilized."

"Not many of us would have thought this was possible," Prendergast said. "The [civil union] act can now create an atmosphere of acceptance for us all."

After the ceremony, a brass band led the wedding party through Civic Square to a reception at the historic Boatshed building.

Other weddings took place in Auckland and Christchurch, reports said.

MIDEAST/AFRICA

JERUSALEM WORLDPRIDE POSTPONED DUE TO GAZA PULLOUT

Organizers of the Jerusalem WorldPride said May 15 they have postponed the international celebration until August 2006. The event's initial schedule for this August would have coincided with the politically sensitive disengagement of Israeli settlers from Gaza.

"We have taken this decision out of consideration to the most difficult political climate expected in Israel this August," said Noa Satath, chairwoman of Jerusalem Open House, the queer service and advocacy organization that was planning this year's WorldPride event. "As a community we are deeply engaged in the complex reality surrounding us."

AMNESTY SUPPORTS ARRESTED SAUDIS

Amnesty International expressed support April 27 for 35 men jailed and sentenced to flogging in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, for the crime of attending a "gay wedding party."

The 35 are among about 105 men who were jailed and sentenced to beatings for alleged homosexual conduct in conjunction with the March 10 party.

A total of 31 of the men were given sentences of six months to a year in prison and 200 lashes each. Four were sentenced to two years' imprisonment and 2,000 lashes. About 70 others were released, reportedly because they had influential connections, but they later were called back to a police station and informed that they, too, had been sentenced to a year in jail.

"The men may be prisoners of conscience, punished solely for their sexual orientation," Amnesty said.

The organization asked its supporters to write to Saudi officials demanding that the sentences be commuted, that the nation stop punishing people solely for being gay and that the exact charges against the men be made known.

Amnesty said flogging is "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment amounting to torture, contrary to Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." 

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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ASIA/PACIFIC

NEW ZEALAND CIVIL UNION LAW TAKES EFFECT

New Zealand's first same-sex weddings took place in early May after a comprehensive civil union law came into force.

In Wellington, civil union "poster boys"