

Amnesty International Blasts Poland

Amnesty International has denounced Poland for "a climate of intolerance...against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, characterized by the banning of public events organized by the LGBT community, openly homophobic language used by some highly placed politicians and incitement of homophobic hatred by some right-wing groupings."

The organization also expressed concern Nov. 25 about "the recent abolition of the government office responsible for promotion of equal treatment for sexual minorities."

The mayor of Poznan, Ryszard Grobelny, banned the city's Gay Pride parade Nov. 15 because of "security concerns." Despite the ban, a few hundred people gathered Nov. 20 for a demonstration. They were harassed by members of the group All Polish Youth, who shouted "Let's gas the fags" and "We'll do to you what Hitler did with Jews."

The police intervened near the end of the march, roughed up several marchers and arrested and interrogated more than 65, who were later released.

"Amnesty International is concerned that the events in Poznan are not a one-off event but part of a series of bans on events by the LGBT community," the organization said.

Warsaw's Gay Pride parade also was banned by local officials both this year and last. Mayor Lech Kaczynski, who is now Poland's president, called this year's parade "sexually obscene." An improvised march took place June 10 anyhow, with more than 2,500 participants.

ASIA/PACIFIC

Australian Capital Territory to Recognize Gay Couples

The government of the Australian Capital Territory will introduce civil union legislation in March to recognize and protect same-sex couples.

A spokesman said the law would grant gay couples all the rights and responsibilities of matrimony. Tasmania is the only Australian state or territory with similar legislation.

New Zealand May Ban Same-Sex Marriage

A bill to ban same-sex marriage was scheduled for first reading in New Zealand's Parliament on Dec. 7.

The measure also would prohibit recognition of same-sex marriages from abroad and amend the Bill of Rights Act to specify that any law designed "to promote or advance marriage" is exempt from being found in violation of the act. A comprehensive civil union law for same-sex couples took effect in New Zealand eight months ago.

Switzerland Elects Gay House Speaker

Members of Switzerland's House of Representatives elected an openly gay speaker Nov. 28.

Lawyer Claude Janiak, a Social Democrat, received 154 of the 177 votes cast. In his first address to the body, he called on fellow MPs to eschew political posturing and vote their convictions, SwissInfo.org reported.

Janiak is best known for lobbying for an easier citizenship procedure for young foreigners, pushing for legalization of marijuana and denouncing the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to same-sex partnerships. He will serve in the position for 12 months.

Push to Report Anti-Gay Abuses to U.S. State Department

Activists in London and San Francisco are urging people around the world to report anti-gay abuses to the U.S. State Department.

They hope to increase the number of such incidents that are included in the department's country-by-country human rights report, which the agency must produce and send to Congress each year. Submissions must be received at the State Department before the end of 2005.

"[This] will help improve the U.S. State Department's monitoring of such abuses and expand a database that can be used by human rights campaigners pressing for an end to homophobia," said longtime independent activist Michael Petrelis. "The data will also be helpful to corroborate the claims of gay people fleeing persecution and seeking asylum."

London activist Peter Tatchell of the gay rights group OutRage added: "The massive scale of homophobic persecution worldwide is grossly underdocumented in all official human rights reports. [We] will be submitting evidence to the U.S. State Department based on our firsthand evidence from LGBT refugees."

Reports should be e-mailed to pottslg@state.gov.

AMERICAS

Knights of Columbus Lose Lesbian Case

The Human Rights Tribunal in Canada's British Columbia ruled against the Knights of Columbus organization Nov. 28, saying it injured the dignity, feelings and self-respect of a lesbian couple by canceling their reservation to hold their wedding reception in the Knights' hall in the town of Port Coquitlam.

Deborah Chymyshyn and Tracey Smith were turned away once the organization's leaders became aware of the nature of the event. They already had sent out their wedding invitations.

The Knights must pay the women \$1,720 plus expenses.



The Knights of Columbus Hall (foreground) is owned by Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church (background) and was found in noncompliance with British Columbia's civil rights laws.

The tribunal said the Knights do have a general right, under religious freedom guarantees, to refuse to rent their hall to homosexuals, but "that right is not absolute." The organization should have met with the women, apologized for the cancellation, reimbursed them for their costs and helped them find a new location, the tribunal said.

Not to have done so offended the women's "inherent dignity" and amounted to "discrimination," the judges said. 10

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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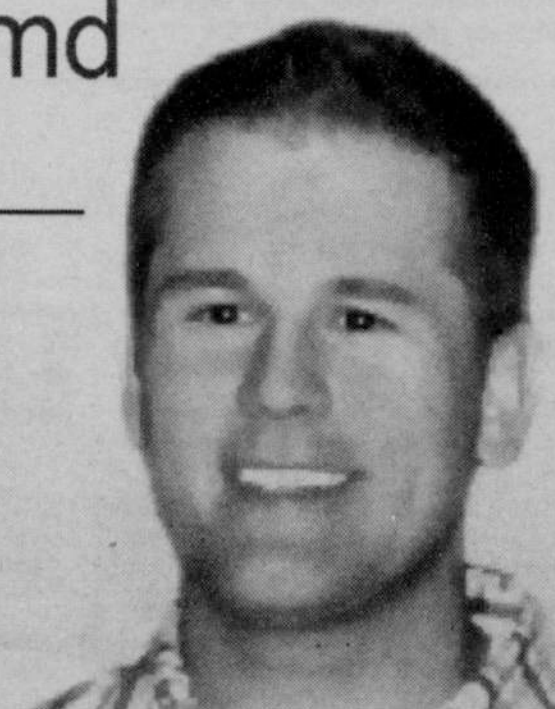
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