



Ali Hili (left) of OutRage, a British gay group, accused death squads under the cover of the Iraqi police of murdering missing gay Iraqi activists.

Same-sex marriage also is legal in Belgium, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain and the state of Massachusetts. Numerous nations have registered partnership or civil union laws that grant same-sex couples some, most or all the rights and obligations of marriage.

MIDEAST/AFRICA Nigeria Set to Ban Gay Life

Nigerian lawmakers are expected to pass pending legislation that will ban nearly everything gay.

The measure outlaws belonging to a gay group, reading a gay book, watching a gay movie, visiting a gay Internet site and socializing by two or more gay people. For good measure, the bill also bans same-sex marriage.

Violating the proposed law would result in up to five years in prison.

Gay sex is already illegal. It is punished with death in Muslim areas of the nation and with jail time in Christian sections.

Report: Iraqi Gay Activists Abducted

Five gay activists were abducted Nov. 9 in Baghdad and haven't been heard from since, the British gay group OutRage has reported.

"The kidnapped men are Amjad, 27; Rafid, 29; Hassan, 24; Ayman, 19; and Ali, 21," OutRage said. "All were members of Iraq's clandestine gay rights movement, Iraqi LGBT.... It is feared they may have been murdered by death squads operating under the cover of the Iraqi police."

OutRage said the Iraqi activists "had been documenting the killing of lesbians and gays, relaying details of homophobic executions to our office in London and providing safe houses and support to queers fleeing the death squads."

At the moment of their apparent disappearance, they were talking on the phone with OutRage member Ali Hili.

"The five men were holding a secret meeting in a safe house in the al-Shaab district of Baghdad," OutRage said. "Suddenly there was a lot of noise, then the connection ended."

Meanwhile, men's clothing store owner Haydar Kamel, 35, "was kidnapped" five days later by "members of the Mahdi army, an Islamist militia loyal to fundamentalist leader Muqtada al-Sadr," OutRage said.

The group said that Kamel had been providing financial support to gay men who were hiding after being threatened by death squads and that he had received death threats himself.

Another recent incident took place at the Jar al-Qamar barber shop in the al-Karada district of Baghdad, OutRage reported.

"It was popular with gay men, which is probably the reason it was targeted," the group said. "All four employees were arrested and taken away by the Iraqi police. They have disappeared. It is feared that these 10 kidnapped men have been summarily executed."

Hili called the disappearances "the latest 'sexual cleansing' operations mounted by extremist Islamist death squads, many of whom have infiltrated the Iraqi police."

"They are systematically targeting gays and lesbians for extrajudicial execution, as part of their so-called moral purification campaign," he said. "The aim of the death squads is the creation of a fundamentalist state."

For more information visit iraqilgbtuk.blogspot.com.

ASIA/PACIFIC Thai Military Reclassifies Gays, Transgender People

Gays and transgender people will no longer be classified as "permanently mentally ill" by Thailand's military, but they still won't be conscripted because they have "sexual identity problems."

The military changed the wording in response to complaints from gays and transgender people who said the reference to mental illness on their military records worked against them when applying for jobs.

All Thai men within certain age brackets are interviewed yearly to determine if they are fit to serve their two years of mandatory military service. Those who show up dressed as women reportedly are forced to strip before being declared permanently unfit.

Australian State Passes Partnership Law

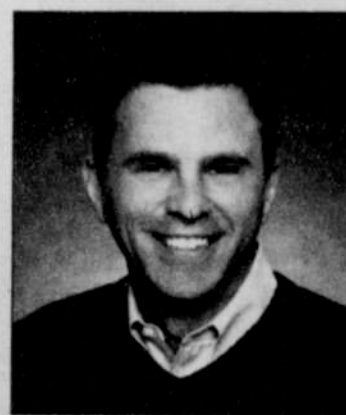
The Legislative Council of the state of South Australia passed a domestic partner bill Dec. 8 granting registered same-sex couples all state-level rights of marriage. The vote was 16-3.

The measure had passed the lower House of Assembly earlier. The partnerships also will be available to any two people who live together. **10**

REX WOCKNER 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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