



Gays and supporters returned to the Vatican since this 2002 protest to picket against Pope Benedict XVI's opposition to gay rights. The protest marked nine years since Alfredo Ormando set himself alight in St. Peter's Square to protest Catholic homophobia.

Ormando, set himself alight in St. Peter's Square to protest Roman Catholic homophobia. Ormando died 10 days later from his injuries.

The Vatican has expressed hostility to the Italian government's promise to introduce a civil union bill into Parliament by the end of January.

The measure is expected to cover areas such as health insurance, health care decisions, hospital and prison visitation, inheritance, immigration, transfer of leases and alimony.

Prime Minister Romano Prodi told local media that such a law would be a "fundamental step forward."

AMERICAS

Mexican State Passes Civil Unions

The Mexican state of Coahuila, which borders Texas, passed a civil union law for same-sex couples Jan. 11.

The state Congress approved the measure 20-13. It was introduced by the centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party, which ruled Mexico for more than 70 years until the election of President Vicente Fox in 2000.

Expressing support for the bill, Coahuila PRI Gov. Humberto Moreira said "it would be discriminatory not to...respect the rights of every person regardless of sexual affiliation."

The law extends most of the rights of matrimony to registered same-sex couples.

Coahuila is known for mining and ranching. Its capital city is Saltillo.

The only other locale in Mexico with a same-sex partnership law is Mexico City. That measure passed the city's Legislative Assembly 43-17 with five abstentions last November. It grants spousal rights in areas such as property, pensions, inheritance, medical decisions and co-parenting. Heterosexual couples and nonsexual couples also can register under the law.

Other Latin American localities with same-sex civil union laws include Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Argentine province of Río Negro; and the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Mexican Gay Leader Murdered

The best-known gay activist in Matamoros, Mexico, was found stabbed to death in his home Jan. 15.

José Ernesto Leal López, 42, was killed just days after staging a press conference calling for the state of Tamaulipas, which borders Texas, to pass a same-

sex partnership law similar to those passed in Mexico City and in the border state of Coahuila.

Leal López also recently had demanded that Matamoros police stop allegedly arresting residents because of their homosexual orientation and charging them \$84 to be released.

But a police department spokesman said the killing appeared to be solely "a crime of passion," noting that there were no signs of forced entry and that there was blood throughout the house.

The Hoy Tamaulipas Web site reported Jan. 19 that openly gay federal congressman David Sánchez Camacho, who serves on a commission concerned with "vulnerable groups," had arrived in Matamoros to challenge the "crime of passion" theory.

"Enough with wanting to solve this crime by saying it was passion and wanting to sweep it under the carpet when we could be facing an anti-gay hate crime," Sánchez Camacho said. "We've come all the way to Tamaulipas to learn the realities of life for people like us on this border."

Matamoros is across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas.

MIDEAST/AFRICA

Trouble for Scottsdale/Marrakech Sister-City Plan

The Scottsdale Sister Cities Association in Arizona has come under fire from gay activists over a plan that would pair Scottsdale and Marrakech, Morocco, as "sister cities."

They say it's contradictory for a city with an official gay tourist outreach program to team up with a country that punishes gay sex with up to three years in prison.

"It wouldn't have been our first pick," said Amy Kobeta, director of public affairs at the Arizona Human Rights Fund and Foundation.

"It makes me curious about what guidelines they used in selecting a sister city," she told *The East Valley Tribune*. "Our hope is that they would look at other areas of the world that are more tolerant."

According to Amnesty International, about 80 of the world's 193 independent nations criminalize gay sex. 10

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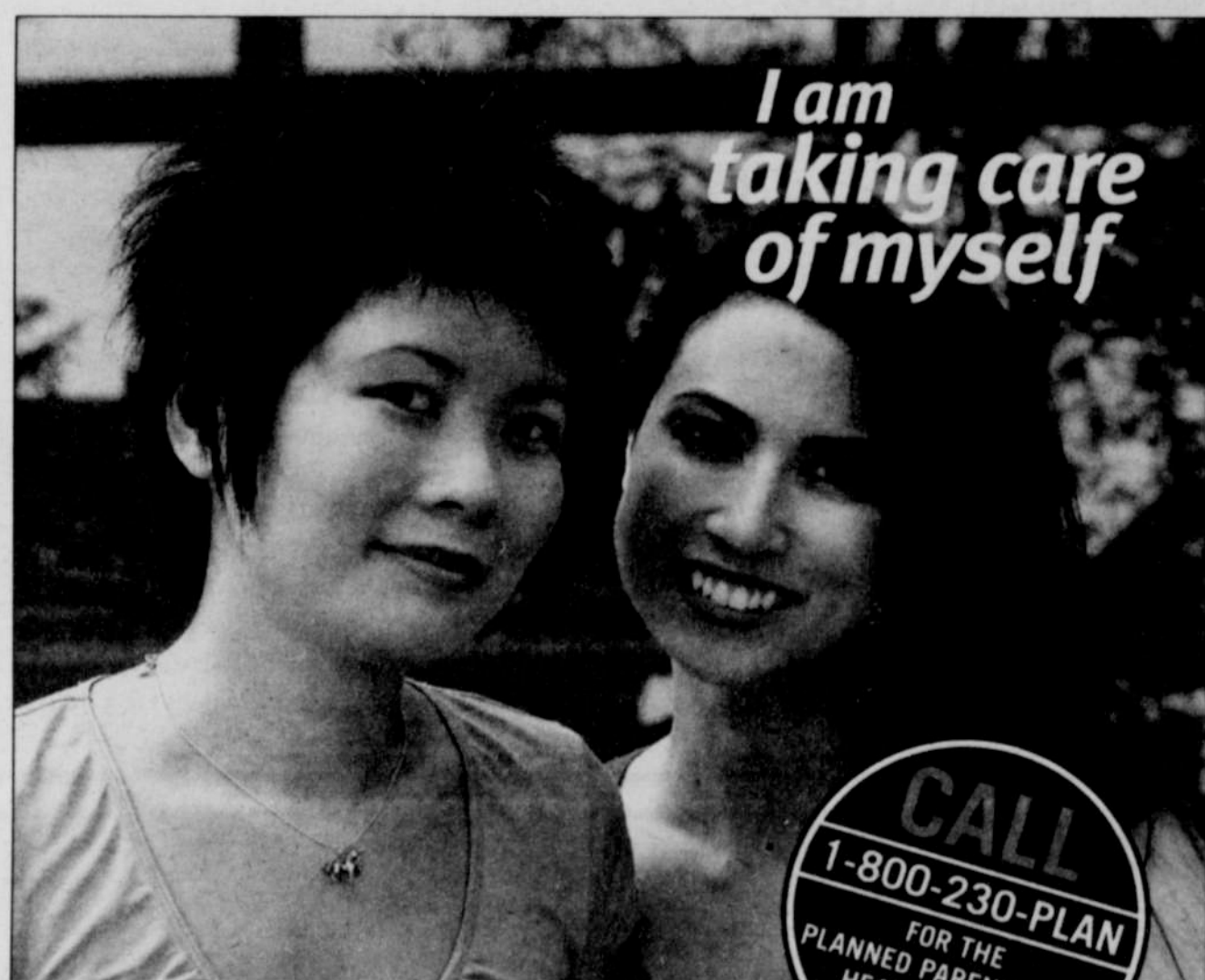
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