

# world

## EUROPE

### Church of Sweden to Marry Gays

As Sweden prepares to legalize full marriage for same-sex couples, the dominant Church of Sweden has decided it also will legally marry same-sex couples.

Faced with the choice, once the law passes, of offering legal marriages to both gays and straights or to no one at all, the Lutheran church's governing body voted 161-74 on Oct. 25 to stay in the marriage business.

Sweden has had a registered partnership law that grants same-sex couples all the rights of marriage since 1994.

### Ireland to Fix Trans Birth Certificates

Ireland must grant transsexuals amended birth certificates or face legal action in the European Court of Human Rights, Dublin High Court Justice Liam McKechnie ruled Oct. 19.

Postoperative transsexual dentist Lydia Foy, 60, who launched the court challenge in 1997, called the decision "a wonderful breakthrough after such a long, long time."

Foy said transsexuals need new birth certificates because when the document doesn't match one's current name or appearance, "you can be outed and embarrassed" anytime a birth certificate is needed for

paperwork requirements. McKechnie said the state's refusal to issue Foy a new document had subjected her to "stress, humiliation, embarrassment and loss of dignity" and jeopardized her right to privacy.

### Vilnius Mayor Blocks Rally

The European branch of the International Lesbian and Gay Association was prevented by the mayor's office from publicly displaying a 30-meter rainbow flag during the group's 11th annual conference Oct. 25 to 28 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Mayor Juozas Imbrasas also blocked an identical action in May when the display was planned as the centerpiece of the city's first Gay Pride celebration. He also banned the European Union's traveling "anti-discrimination truck" from visiting the city at the same time.

City officials said the flag display could cause "riots."

More than 200 people attended the ILGA-Europe confab, which was otherwise unmolested by the city government.



Deborah Lambillotte, co-chairwoman of ILGA-Europe's executive board, spoke out for the rights of queer Lithuanians.

"We are appalled that an EU member state repeatedly violates the right to a free and peaceful assembly," said Deborah Lambillotte, co-chairwoman of ILGA-Europe's executive board. "LGBT people have the same right to express their views and concerns publicly and, as any other citizen of the European Union, to

enjoy the rights guaranteed in the Lithuanian Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights."

### Gays Picket Saudi Embassy in London

About 50 people picketed Saudi Arabia's embassy Oct. 19 in London in protest against the nation's reported floggings and executions of gay men.

Two Saudi men convicted of sodomy in the city of Al Bahah received the first of their 7,000 lashes in punishment Oct. 2, the *Okaz* daily newspaper reported. The whippings took place in public, the report said.

The London protest, staged just prior to a state visit by Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, was organized by the National Union of Students and the gay direct-action group OutRage.

"As well as flogging and executing gay people, the Saudi leaders are guilty of detention without trial, torture and the public beheading of women who have sex outside of marriage," said OutRage leader Peter Tatchell. "The country is a theocratic police state."

Activist Brett Lock added, "Saudi leaders should be shunned until they stop their homophobic persecution and their many other human rights abuses."

The activists delivered a protest letter to the Saudi ambassador, Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud.



Activist Peter Tatchell accused the Saudi leaders of executing gays, granting detention without trial, torture and beheading.

## ASIA/PACIFIC

### Singapore MPs Keep Gay Sex Ban

Singapore's Parliament decriminalized oral and anal sex for heterosexuals Oct. 23 but declined to also legalize gay sex.

Penal Code Section 377A punishes

sex between men—"gross indecency"—with two years in prison. The law is rarely, if ever, enforced.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong supported keeping the ban, saying that Singaporean society is conservative and that he didn't want to encourage gays to start pushing for such things as access to adoption and marriage.

"We do not approve of [gays] setting the tone of mainstream society," Lee said. "They live their lives—that's their personal space. But the tone of the overall society, I think, it remains conventional, it remains straight, and we want it to remain so."

"We were right to uphold the family unit when Western countries went for experimental lifestyles in the 1960s—the hippies, free love—but I'm glad we did that because today, if you look at Western Europe, marriage as an institution is dead." 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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