

Human Rights Watch denounced the measure. "There is no excuse for playing politics with families' welfare," said Boris Dittrich, advocacy director of Human Rights Watch's LGBT Rights Program. "These proposals not only deliberately discriminate against same-sex couples but threaten their families, including children. It is an insult to Romania's achievements elsewhere in overcoming discrimination."

Swedish Court: Lesbians Can Buy Puppies

Lesbians must be allowed to buy dogs, a Stockholm appeals court affirmed Feb. 11.

A kennel owner in the Stockholm suburb of Värmdö, Anette Sjöholm, had refused to sell a puppy to a lesbian, Smila Bergström, because she had read that transvestites are involved in animal pornography and she believed that made homosexuals untrustworthy. The court unanimously rejected her defense, as did a lower district court, according to a report in the Stockholm publication *The Local*.

Sjöholm must pay Bergström \$3,085 in damages for discrimination and harassment and must reimburse \$6,940 to the state Ombudsman Against Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation for its legal expenses.

ASIA/PACIFIC

Israel OKs Gay Adoption

Israel's Justice Ministry announced Feb. 10 that same-sex couples can adopt children.

"When it is for the good of the adopted child, it is possible to agree to requests from same-sex couples to adopt a child who is not the child of one of the partners," the ministry announced on behalf of Attorney General Menachem Mazuz.

Welfare Minister Isaac Herzog welcomed the move, saying: "There is no reason why same-sex couples who meet the criteria for adoption should not be able to join the process of adoption and of parenthood. We must adapt to the spirit of the times and the changes that are afoot."

Ultra-Orthodox lawmakers denounced the decision, saying it will lead to children being placed in an unnatural environment.

Olivia Newton-John to Perform at Sydney Mardi Gras

1970s pop star and gay favorite Olivia Newton-John will perform at the party that follows the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade March 1.



Olivia Newton-John says she is "hopelessly devoted" to her gay fans.



Human rights advocate Boris Dittrich denounced Romania's consideration to ban same-sex marriage.

Newton-John, 59, said the appearance is payback for four decades of support from gay people.

"The gay community has always been a major supporter of mine, and I am hopelessly devoted to each and every one of them," she said. "I can't wait."

AFRICA

Eight Men Jailed in Egypt on Homosexuality Charges

Human Rights Watch highlighted Feb. 5 the cases of eight men incarcerated in Cairo, Egypt, after homosexuality-related arrests or convictions.

Two men were arrested last October while having an argument on the street, after one of them told police officers he was HIV-positive. They were handcuffed to a desk for four days in the office of the Morality Police, were later subjected to anal probes and forced HIV testing, reportedly tested positive and remain in custody in a hospital handcuffed to beds 23 hours a day.

Two other men were arrested because their phone numbers or photographs were in the possession of the first two men. They also were force-tested for HIV and remain in custody pending possible filing of charges.

Four additional men were arrested in November after they secured a lease and moved into the apartment of one of the first four men. They were tortured in custody; deprived of food, drink and blankets; and force-tested for HIV. In January, the four were convicted of "habitual practice of debauchery" and sentenced to one year in prison. The convictions were upheld on appeal Feb. 2.

One of the men was told he is HIV-positive and is incarcerated in a hospital chained to a bed 23 hours a day.

"These cases show Egyptian police acting on the dangerous belief that HIV is not a condition to be treated but a crime to be punished," said Scott Long, director of Human Rights Watch's LGBT Rights Program. "HIV tests forcibly taken without consent, ill treatment in detention, trials driven by prejudice, and convictions without evidence all violate international law."

Human Rights Watch has urged authorities to drop all charges, stop chaining detainees to hospital beds and make sure the eight men receive good medical care for any serious health conditions. 

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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