

Report: Gay Life in Albania Is Not Good

Gay people in Albania face routine intolerance and physical and psychological violence, says a new report by Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights.

The report was presented June 18 to the council's Parliamentary Assembly and Committee of Ministers.

"An open discussion regarding homosexuality remains taboo in Albania," Hammarberg wrote. "LGBT persons are routinely subject to intolerance, physical and psychological violence and seen by many as persons suffering from an 'illness.' There have also been cases of mistreatment by the police."

"There is no single competent body that may accept complaints on the grounds of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in Albania in the context of employment," the report continued. "This lacuna results in victims being dissuaded or discouraged entirely from seeking just satisfaction."

Hammarberg said that "to sensitize people on diversity of sexuality requires education." He recommended "a combination of public campaigns, integration of further sexual education within school curricula and further training of state professionals, including law enforcement, judicial and medical personnel."

U.K. Foreign Office Issues Gay Rights Kit to Embassies

The United Kingdom's Foreign Office has adopted an official program in support of sexual minority rights and issued a toolkit to its embassies around the world to further the undertaking.

"The program and toolkit provide a great opening for LGBT activists to approach their local U.K. embassy when they need help," said the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association.

The Netherlands and Sweden are the only other countries with similar projects aimed at supporting gay equality in foreign nations.

Lebanese Lesbians Form New Organization

Lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer women in Lebanon have formed a new organization called MEEM.



With the help of Tasmanian Greens MP Nick McKim, Tasmania may become the first Australian state to open marriage to gay couples.

"The group was created on the idea that women should be encouraged to empower themselves and each other through mutual support," organizers said in a statement. "Our goal is to create a safe space in Lebanon where LBTQs can meet, talk, discuss issues, share experiences and work on improving their lives and themselves."

ASIA/PACIFIC Same-Sex Marriage Bill Introduced in Tasmania

Tasmanian Greens MP Nick McKim introduced a bill July 1 to legalize same-sex marriage in the state Parliament. If it passes, Tasmania will become the first Australian state to open marriage to gay couples.

Marriage has been considered a federal rather than a state matter in Australia, and a federal law explicitly bans same-sex marriage. But McKim said new legal research has revealed that states are not barred from legalizing same-sex marriage on their own.

Should Tasmania do so, the federal government could reverse it only via a High Court challenge.

Tasmania already has a law that grants many of the rights and obligations of marriage to registered same-sex couples.

But a spokesman for the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group, Rodney Croome, said that doesn't constitute true equality. "It's painful for many same-sex couples to see their counterparts in places like California taking solemn legal vows of lifelong commitment while knowing they cannot do the same in their own country." 

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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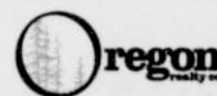
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