

Vladimir Špidla
Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities
European Commission

Brussels, 15 November 2006

Dear Commissioner Špidla,

Subject: LGBT rights in Poland and Latvia

In a briefing published tomorrow, Amnesty International documents how the lack of respect and protection of the human rights of lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people remains an area of concern in several EU countries, despite the EU's commitment to combat all forms of discrimination. The briefing highlights how various forms of discrimination faced by LGBT people in two Member States, Poland and Latvia, affect their fundamental rights, including the right to peaceful assembly.

The aim of the briefing is to show the degree of the discrimination faced by LGBT people in Poland and Latvia by giving concrete examples of homophobic statements made by government officials in the last two years. The briefing also documents the ordeals recently faced by the organisers of the Equality Parade in March 2006 in Warsaw and the decision of the Latvian local authorities to ban the "Riga Pride 2006" in July 2006. It describes the counter-demonstrations, the use of racist slogans and the perpetration of violent attacks against sympathisers and participants of the Gay Pride marches.

In letters addressed to the Commission in June and July this year, Amnesty International already raised these and other concerns documented in the report, urging the EU institutions to take concrete steps to ensure that the EU's fundamental values are upheld. We believe that such incidents cast a long shadow over how EU Member States live up to their international and European human rights obligations, including standards they committed to when they joined the EU. They further reveal the need for EU institutions to be vigilant in upholding its common values and monitoring how they are respected in practice.

Amnesty International calls on the EU Commission and the Council:

- to ensure that EU Member States adhere to their commitments to combat all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation;
- to support the right to freedom of assembly, including the Gay Pride marches and similar events in all EU Member States;
- to take active steps to promote human rights of LGBT people in the context of the upcoming 2007 "European Year of Equal Opportunities";

- to continue working on the European Commission's proposed Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia and to consider a broader instrument to address all forms of hate speech, covering all grounds of discrimination as outlined in Article 13 TEC.

I thank you for your attention and hope that our renewed call for effective monitoring on non-discrimination will be given substantive follow-up.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dick Oosting', written in a cursive style.

Dick Oosting

Director

Amnesty International EU Office