

EMERGENCY RESPONSE NETWORK

of the

INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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IGLHRC Action Alert

NEW

OFFICES OF TRIANGULO ROSA IN COSTA RICA ATTACKED

On December 16th, following months of threatening phone calls, pranks, and minor acts of vandalism, the members of **Asociacion Triangulo Rosa** discovered that all the windows in their offices had been broken by vandals. This attack is only the latest attempt to intimidate members of Triangulo Rosa, a gay and lesbian organization in Costa Rica, and force the closure of their offices in the town of Alajuela. In the weeks leading to the most recent attack, vandals wrote obscenities on the walls and doors of the Triangulo Rosa offices. The group also received threatening phone calls demanding the group leave Alajuela.

Triangulo Rosa attempted to file a complaint with the local police authorities who refused to accept it, claiming the incident was not within their jurisdiction. The complaint was then presented to the Organismo de Investigacion Judicial (Institution for Judicial Investigation). Triangulo Rosa also approached the Defensoria de los Habitantes de la Republic (Defender of the Inhabitants of the Republic), which serves as an ombudsman on human rights cases, immediately following the attack requesting increased police protection and an immediate investigation. None of the agencies have responded.

Asociacion Triangulo Rosa has asked that international activists write letters stressing the following points:

1. Violence against minorities is deplorable and it is the responsibility of the Costa Rican government to investigate attacks against any and all minority groups including sexual minorities to ensure that perpetrators of these attacks are prosecuted for their crimes.
2. In situations where individuals or groups believe they may be in danger, it is the government's duty to provide adequate police protection.
3. The government of a country with Costa Rica's otherwise impressive human rights records needs to recognize that violations of the rights of sexual minorities are indeed human rights violations.

Please send letters to:

Rodrigo Carazo
Defensoria de Los Habitantes
Apartado 1240-1007
Centro Colon
Costa Rica
Fax : 506-296-2512

Please send copies of your letters to IGLHRC and to Asociacion Triangulo Rosa so that they

may also use them when appropriate.

Asociacion Triangulo Rosa
Att: Francisco Madrigal
Apartado 1619-4950
Alajuela, Costa Rica
E-mail: rastern@sol.racsa.co.cr

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

NAMIBIA'S NUJOMA ATTACKS HOMOSEXUALS

At the opening of the Swapo Women's Council Congress on December 6, 1996, President Nujoma of Namibia made a departure from his prepared speech to attack Namibia's homosexual citizens. With glaring similarity to Zimbabwe's President Mugabe in his disregard for the civil rights of lesbians and gay men, President Nujoma stated that "all necessary steps must be taken to combat influences that are influencing us and our children in a negative way. Homosexuals must be condemned and rejected in our society." *The Windhoek Advertiser* reports that this attack was immediately followed by a call from the Rainbow Project for dialogue with the head of state. The Rainbow Project, a coalition of Namibian gays and lesbians, indicated that Prime Minister Hage Geingob had in 1990 assured Namibia's homosexual citizens of their rights under Article 10.2 of the Constitution.

Article 10.2 of the Namibian Constitution states that "no person may be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status." The growing international trends to interpret "other status" to include sexual orientation. Presumably, Prime Minister Hage Geingob supported that interpretation of the Namibia Constitution.

While President Nujoma has as yet made no public response to the outcry against his statements, he has issued no further attacks. Though this attack does not appear to have been precipitated by any high profile action on the part of Namibia's homosexual community, it is not unprecedented. There was a similar outcry from Namibia's lesbian and gay citizens in October of 1995, when Ministers Helmut Angula and Nahas Angula, and

Deputy Minister Hadino Hishongwa jointly denounced homosexuality as "an un-African social evil." Deputy Minister Hishongwa further declared homosexuality to be "pathological" and "curable through long-term treatment."

ALSO INSIDE

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UPDATE

May 1996 Action

AUSTRIAN ANTI-GAY LAWS REPEALED

On December 12, 1996, the Upper Chamber of the Austrian Parliament passed a bill which included the full repeal of anti-gay Articles 220 & 221 of the Penal Code. As expected, this vote corroborates the November 27, 1996 Lower Chamber decision, and the reform comes into effect on March 1, 1997. This is a significant, albeit partial victory, for the Austrian Lesbian & Gay movement, which has struggled for this reform for the past 17 years.

Article 200 criminalized the production or distribution of materials presenting homosexuality in a positive light with a penalty of up to six months imprisonment, while Article 221 prohibited with a similar penalty, the existence of groups whose mandate included the promotion of homosexuality. Article 209, however—which imposes an unequal age of consent of 18 for gay men versus 14 for lesbians and heterosexuals—remains on the books.

The left wing Social Democrats, Greens, and Liberal Forum had proposed the full repeal of all three articles in the Lower Chamber, but unfortunately do not constitute a Parliamentary majority.

The Austrian lesbian and gay movement extends their thanks to all who supported their international campaign which began last April. We thank you as well for participating in the IGLHRC letter writing campaign. We shall update you on developments in the struggle against Article 209.

NEW

PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL RETRACTS HOMOPHOBIC REMARKS, BUT FALLS SHORT OF A FULL APOLOGY

On December 20th, the President of Israel, Ezer Weizman, made a series of homophobic remarks about lesbians and gay men in response to a question by a high school student at the Reali School in Haifa, where the President was speaking. Weizman said that he found gays and lesbians "disgusting".

Weizman called for legal steps to determine the status of homosexuals and lesbians and said it was up to society not to encourage this phenomenon. In the past, he noted, homosexuals were considered a security risk. Weizman expressed opposition to same-sex marriage and concern that homosexuality has become "nice."

The response to Weizman's comments was swift. Member of the Knesset (MK) Yael Dayan immediately called upon Weizman to apologize for his remarks, stating Weizman had engaged in incitement against an entire group in Israeli society. MK Naomi Hazan called for his resignation. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel also condemned the president's remarks and said that, as president, he has a responsibility to work for the dignity of all persons in

Israel. It is important to note that while the office of the Presidency in Israel is a largely ceremonial one, the head of state is seen as a unifying force in the country. The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations sent a letter to Weizman expressing their concern over his remarks, urging him to retract his statements and apologize.

On the day following Weizman's remarks, a group of over 500 people gathered outside Weizman's Jerusalem home to protest his homophobic statements. Chants of "Big mouth, small head" and "Weizman homophobe" were heard throughout the crowd.

On December 23rd after an hour long meeting with members of the Society for the Protection of Personal Rights in Israel and various Ministers of the Knesset, the President's bureau chief Arye Shumer released the following statement to the press:

"The president sees legislation which discriminates as undermining the foundations of democracy, the rules of natural justice, and the dignity and freedom of man, and he has no intention of encouraging legislation which leads to discrimination between citizens of the state regardless of origin, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. The president says that any deed or expression in which people are publicly humiliated - or deeds which can be interpreted as such - should be regretted," the statement continued. "The dignity, rights, and well-being of all the citizens of Israel must be upheld."

The President did not address the press directly following the meeting and many of the meeting participants, while satisfied with the outcome, believe it to be only a first step. MK Hazan said at the end of the meeting that the call for the President's resignation was suspended but she described him as "on probation" for the remainder of his presidency.

Members of the Society for the Protection of Personal Rights request that international activists continue to pressure the Israeli government to honor the rights of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in Israel.

For those wishing to write directly to the President:

President Ezer Weizman
Office of the President
3 Hanassi Street
92188 Jerusalem
ISRAEL
E-mail: ask@israel-info.gov.il

**To contact the Society For The Protection Of
Personal Rights For Gay Men, Lesbians, And
Bisexuals (SPPR) in Israel write to:**

"Ha-Agudah"
P.O. Box 37604
Tel Aviv 61375
ISRAEL

Phone: 972-3-6204327 or 972-3-6293681
Fax: 972-3-5252341
E-mail: sppr@netvision.net.il

NEW**ACTIVISTS WIN ANOTHER VICTORY FOR THE LGBT COMMUNITY IN ROSARIO ARGENTINA'S SECOND LARGEST TOWN**

On December 20th, the Rosario town council adopted an anti-discrimination clause submitted by Colectivo Arco Iris. The clause, based on the one adopted by Buenos Aires a few months ago and supported by various international human rights organizations, reads: "no discrimination [on the basis of] race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, ideology, nationality, physical appearance, psychological, social, economic condition, or any other circumstance will be allowed ... The city promotes the removal of any and every type of obstacle that actually restricts equality and freedom, [or] impedes a person's full development and her/his effective participation in the social, political, or economic community life."

Rosario's activists celebrated the new clause, hoping it will help to ameliorate some of the harsh realities currently faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT) there. According to Colectivo Arco Iris, discrimination on the job, arbitrary arrest, and youth suicide are the main problems affecting the Rosario LGBT community. In particular, the organization receives an average of 30 complaints per month regarding workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Colectivo Arco Iris is one of the main LGBT organization outside of Buenos Aires. Their current activities include: support groups for lesbians, transgender people, and people living with HIV/AIDS; massive distribution of leaflets educating the community about HIV/AIDS; work projects for people with AIDS; a hotline for reporting incidents of discrimination; and an ongoing visibility campaign in the local media, community organizations, and schools. Colectivo Arco Iris was also the host of the first National Gathering of LGBT people in Argentina and a key factor in its success.

If you want to congratulate Rosario activists for their victory, please write to:

Colectivo Arco Iris
C.C. 208 (2000), Rosario
Provincia de Santa Fe
Argentina
Phone/fax: (54 - 41) 47 02 68

UPDATE

Original Action--May 1992

CHILEAN SENATE COMMITTEE REFUSES REPEAL OF SODOMY LAWS

On December 16, 1996, the Chilean Senate Committee on Constitution, Legislation Justice, and Rules passed a resolution recommending that the full Senate not consider legislation decriminalizing sodomy. The legislation before the Committee had been approved by the lower house of the Chilean Parliament in 1995 and included the legalization of most same-sex relationships. However, the Committee's recommendation to not approve the legislation will now be considered by the full Senate.

The members of the Committee justified their recommendation by saying they did not want to send the wrong message to society. Senators aligned with the more conservative parties have publicly stated their belief that homosexuality is an "aberration against nature."

Should the Senate fail to consider the changes proposed by the Chamber of Deputies, Article 365 of the Chilean Penal Code, which makes sodomy a criminal offense with penalties ranging from 541 days to 3 years in prison, would remain in force. Chile and Ecuador are the only countries in South America with sodomy laws.

Movimiento de Liberacion Homosexual (MOVILH), a gay group in Chile, has been working since 1991 to repeal the sodomy laws. They have asked international activists to denounce the Committee's recent decision and to explain to Senators the importance of repealing article 365 of the Chilean Penal Code to ensure that sexual minorities are accorded the same rights as other citizens. Of particular importance is the freedom of consenting adults to engage in same-sex relations without the threat of persecution.

Please send letters urging the repeal of article 365 to:

Presidencia del Senado
Señor Sergio Diez
Fax: 56-32-232-654
E-mail: sdiez@congreso.cl

Presidente Comisión, Miguel Otero Lathrop
Fax: 56-32-232-654
E-mail: mol@congreso.cl

YOUR LETTERS CAN DO DOUBLE DUTY

Please send copies of your letters to IGLHRC so that we can forward them to local activists to use in lobbying their governments.

THANKS

to all who wrote letters to the City of Tokyo (August 1996 ERN) about the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the City's youth hostels. A recent update from the Japanese group OCCUR, which is bringing the case against the city, informs us that an expert witness has been

WE NEED YOUR HELP - JOIN THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE NETWORK

The International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) documents, monitors, and mobilizes response to human rights violations against gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people, and people with HIV/AIDS worldwide. **Please sign up** to receive action alerts on a regular basis (via email or postal service) and become part of an international campaign to make a difference in the lives of sexual minorities all over the world. To receive by mail, please fill out the coupon below and return it to:

IGLHRC
1360 Mission Street, Suite 200
San Francisco, CA 94103 U.S.A.
+1-415-255-8680 telephone
+1-415-255-8662 fax

FOR EMAIL (saving printing costs, postage, and trees) write to: **iglhrc@iglhrc.org** with the message "subscribe"; note your choice of language (English, Spanish, or French) and if you would like to cancel your printed ERN subscription.



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San Francisco, CA 94103 U.S.A.



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Oklahoma City OK 73112