

Amnesty International demands equal rights for GLBT people

by Daniel Soto Mayorga
Special to Q-Notes

ROME, ITALY—In a statement released June 29, Amnesty International said that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people around the world are still often not recognized as "equal in dignity and rights" and continue to face repression and harassment.

The organization's Italian Section and LGBT Network held an "International LGBT Human Rights Rally and Press Conference" on July 2 in Rome, in conjunction with World Pride 2000, on the human rights of GLBT people.

In countries as diverse as Argentina and Malaysia, Brazil and Romania, Austria and Venezuela, Australia and Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe, and many more, people are persecuted, discriminated against, arrested, tortured and even killed for their sexual orientation.

"The rights to freely determine one's sexual orientation — a fundamental aspect of the human personality — and to express it without fear are human rights in the fullest sense," Amnesty International said.

"The struggle of gay people for equality is a struggle for human rights, and as such it must

be supported at any time," the organization added.

During World Pride 2000 in Rome, Amnesty International was drawing special attention to GLBT human rights in Europe, where the organization's main human GLBT concerns lie with Eastern Europe, Romania, Cyprus and Austria. During the whole World Pride week, a special petition signing action on the age of consent in Austria was held in the World Pride Village and the streets of Rome.

Article 209 of the Austrian penal code states: "A man over 19 years of age who engages in same-sex lewdness with a person who has attained the age of 14 but not yet the age of

18 shall be punished with imprisonment from six months to five years."

Similar punishments do not exist for identical lesbian or heterosexual contacts. As such, Amnesty argues the article violates the Austrian Government's obligations under international law to guarantee equal treatment and non-discrimination for all individuals in the enjoyment of human rights. World Pride 2000, the largest Pride event of this year, offered the right forum for GLBT human rights defenders from South America, Africa and Europe to spotlight their issues. ▼

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mention was also given to Dr. J. Marion Sims, the father of gynecology, who learned his profession by practicing on female slaves in the 19th Century.

When the new Confederate flag went up at the Soldier's monument, the Stepdaughters handed out hundreds of yellow "SHAME" signs provided by the SC Progressive Network and distributed some 1500 whistles to "Blow the whistle on racism." It was obvious from the confrontation during and after the ceremony that this debate is far from over. ▼

Some companies in Georgia are behind the times in their treatment of their lesbian and gay employees," said Knox. "We are launching this initiative because our gay daughters, sons, fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins should receive benefits for their dependent family members just like everyone else.

More than 3400 private and public employers provide these benefits to their employees. So far this year, an average of five employers a week are announcing these benefits, according to HRC's WorkNet, which tracks these trends. Earlier in June, DaimlerChrysler Corp., Ford Motor Co., and General Motors Corp., along with the United Auto Workers union, announced they would offer health care coverage to same-sex partners of all eligible US employees. It was the first time an entire industry, along with its leading union, announced domestic partner benefits simultaneously. Additionally, more than half of the Fortune 500 include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. ▼

"You don't have to see God as straight, white and a man."

"I hadn't been going to church for five years, because I couldn't believe in anything. I wanted something I could relate to as a woman, a lesbian woman."

"It was the same for both of us. Walking into a Unitarian Universalist service and feeling immediately at home. We felt welcomed. We didn't have to be different people — we could be ourselves."

"We could be together...a couple. No one was going to kick us out."

"It goes way, way beyond tolerance."

Unitarian Universalists encourage diversity and acceptance."

"I mean not everyone is Ozzie and Harriet."



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Flag

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a Confederate battle flag on Statehouse grounds in the year 2000.

Following the performance, the Stepdaughters distributed flyers telling about some of the folks who have been immortalized in bronze on the SC Statehouse grounds. For example, Gov. Benjamin Ryan Tillman's intimidation of African Americans who attempted to vote in the early 20th Century is legendary. Special

Coke

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and retaining the most diverse workforce in the world," Coke said in its statement. "Our goal is to ensure that the Coca-Cola Company is the best place for all people to work. This extension of benefits is another step toward achieving that goal."

"Coca-Cola has provided world-class leadership to the beverage industry, and to the business community in . . . Georgia by taking this historic action," said Harry Knox of the Georgia Equality Project (GEP), which represents Georgia's GLBT citizens. The GEP also played a key role in working with the company and KOLAGE to help bring about the new policy.

GEP also unveiled a new initiative to persuade nine other Georgia-based companies, including Home Depot, BellSouth, Delta Airlines, Wachovia, and UPS to provide domestic-partner benefits to their gay and lesbian employees.



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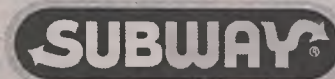
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