

URGENT ACTION

ENSURE PRIDE MARCHES CAN SAFELY TAKE PLACE

On 14 June the governorate of Izmir banned all Pride events, followed by the governorate of Antalya the next day. Pride events in other cities have been prevented or are also at imminent risk of being banned, including in Istanbul, where Pride is at risk for the fifth year in a row. This clampdown on the LGBTI community in Turkey has been continuing this year despite this Pride season being the first one after the end of Turkey's state of emergency in July 2018. The authorities must lift these unlawful bans and ensure that all Pride events are allowed to safely take place. They must protect the right to peaceful assembly without discrimination.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu
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Dear Minister,

I am writing to you in relation to the planned Pride marches in several cities in Turkey, including Izmir (22 June), Istanbul (30 June) and Mersin (early July).

Istanbul Pride, a peaceful and inclusive event organized since 2003, has been unlawfully prevented from taking place since 2015. A Pride march organized by students at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara on 10 May 2019 was violently broken up by police. Now, orders by Izmir and Antalya governorates from 14 and 15 June respectively, do not only ban the Pride marches but all planned Pride events in these cities on the grounds of hypothetical risks to public order and security, among others.

The right to peaceful assembly is protected under Turkey's and international law and cannot be prohibited on vague grounds. The responsibility to maintain public order and to facilitate the enjoyment of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly lies with the state, including its law enforcement agencies.

The recent blanket bans on Pride marches and events in Antalya and Izmir constitute unlawful bans and must be urgently lifted. Preventing Pride events from taking place in these cities and others is a violation of the rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression in Turkey.

I call on you to take all necessary steps to guarantee that Pride participants everywhere in Turkey can safely exercise their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression and celebrate Pride.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 14 June 2019, İzmir Governorate announced on its website that LGBTI community events planned between 17-23 June -announced dates of the Pride week- are banned in Izmir province “to ensure residents’ peace and safety, right to physical integrity, [...] public safety, national security, public order, and to protect general morality or rights and freedoms of others, as well as to prevent possible violence and terrorism.” A day later, the organizers of the Antalya Pride week were informed of a two-week ban on the Pride march and other related events issued by Antalya governorate on similar grounds effective from 15 June.

This year’s İzmir Pride march, which has been taking place since 2013, is scheduled for Saturday 22 June. The third Antalya Pride week had been planned between 14-16 June, but the Pride march scheduled for Sunday 16 June could not take place due to the ban.

Hypothetical risks to national security or public order cannot establish legitimate grounds for prohibiting a peaceful assembly. The principles of necessity and proportionality require consideration of all relevant circumstances, the impact on the legitimate concern protected and the possibility that the risk will concretize, and whether less restrictive means would suffice.

States have a positive obligation to facilitate the right to peaceful assembly in law and in practice. As it is also the case in Turkish law, the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly is not subject to the permission of government authorities. This right is also protected under international law and standards in conventions Turkey is a party to. Any decision to disperse an assembly should be taken only as a last resort and carefully in line with the principles of necessity and proportionality, i.e. only when there are no other means available to protect a legitimate aim which outweighs the right of people to assemble peacefully.

In the context of a relentless crackdown on civil society in Turkey, the once growing and vibrant LGBTI movement’s visibility and ability to organize is being severely curtailed as a result of unjustified and unlawful bans over the last years.

These most recent bans are not the first ones of their kind in Turkey. Ankara governorate had imposed a blanket indefinite ban on all LGBTI events in Ankara on 18 November 2017 in the context of the state of emergency. The ban was only lifted by a court decision on 21 February 2019 as a result of an appeal by Ankara based LGBTI rights organisation KAOS GL. Pride march organized by students at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara on 10 May 2019 was violently broken up by police.

Celebrated annually since 2003, Istanbul Pride is at risk of being banned for the fifth year in a row. Istanbul Pride Parade has historically been the biggest event held by LGBTI activists and supporters in Turkey. It used to attract tens of thousands of participants and was once held up by the Turkish authorities as an example of their respect for human rights. The last time Istanbul Pride went ahead without restrictions was in 2014 when over 90,000 people attended a vibrant, inclusive and peaceful march. The repeated prevention of the Pride march in recent years is yet another example of the authorities’ widespread crackdown on dissent, the deterioration of the human rights situation in Turkey in general, and the authorities’ failure to uphold LGBTI rights.

Pride marches organized since 2015 in Mersin have also reportedly been prohibited over the years, where organizers had to limit their gatherings to reading out press statements. The fifth Pride week in Mersin is planned in early July, including a Pride march.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Turkish, English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 29 July 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. His Excellency Mr Ümüt YalÇin, Embassy of the Republic of Turkey 43 Belgrave Square SW1X 8PA 020 7393 0202 Fax 020 7393 0066 embassy.london@mfa.gov.tr london.emb.mfa.gov.tr **Please check with your section before sending appeals after the above date**