

Lord Provost
City Chambers
High Street
Edinburgh
EH1 1YJ

20 December 2011

Dear Lord Provost

Amnesty International Scotland, Equality Network, Scottish Youth Parliament and NUS Scotland would like to bring to your attention our concerns about the human rights situation in St. Petersburg, Russia. We also urge you to use your influence because of the twinning arrangement between Edinburgh and St. Petersburg, to call on the Governor of St. Petersburg to oppose this legislation.

We are asking you to write to the Governor of St. Petersburg, Georgy Poltavchenko, to express your concerns about the oppressive and discriminatory laws that are currently being debated.

For the past few years, Amnesty International has noted a clampdown on freedom of expression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals, NGOs and activists in Russia.

Organisers of film festivals and cultural festivals on LGBTI issues have faced harassment and interference, and gay prides and other public events organised by and for LGBTI people have been attacked by violent protesters and banned by the police, who have also detained peaceful demonstrators standing up for LGBTI rights.

In November 2011, the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg voted in the first reading in favour of the amendment to the Law on Administrative Violations, which aim to introduce fines for *“public actions aimed at propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, transgenerness amongst minors”*.

The amendment would adversely affect the freedom of expression and assembly of individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, as well as the activities and operations of LGBTI rights organisations. It would also hamper the work of other human rights defenders working to protect the rights of LGBTI individuals. The amendment would violate the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and the rights to non-discrimination and equality before the law enshrined in numerous international human rights treaties, to which Russia is a party, including the ICCPR and the ECHR. The amendment would also violate the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which prohibits discrimination and guarantees the right to freedom of expression.

The proposed amendments would also prevent LGBTI young people from accessing or sharing information that is vital to their health and well-being, including information about social groups, support networks, and sexual and reproductive health. This would have serious detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of young people who identify as, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex.

We are deeply concerned about comments made by various members of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg during and following the first reading of the law on 16 November, calling for a prohibition of websites of LGBTI organizations, and calling for the use of the word 'rainbow', and images of rainbows to be classified as propaganda for homosexuality under the legislation. The example of calling a nursery 'Rainbow' was cited as something that should be included under the legislation.

The stated aim of the amendment is to protect children from harm and from violations of their human rights. However, we believe that, as currently formulated, the law will not protect children and will in fact constitute a violation of the human rights of many, including of children and young people in St. Petersburg. This amendment, if passed, will further entrench discrimination and hostility towards, and in some cases, as Amnesty International has documented violence against LGBTI individuals.

Amnesty International Scotland, Equality Network, Scottish Youth Parliament and NUS Scotland would urge you to use your influence to communicate directly to the Governor of St. Petersburg and express your concern at these discriminatory and harmful amendments which should not become law. We ask you to urge the authorities in St. Petersburg:

- Not to vote for or sign into law the amendment banning "*public actions aimed at propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, transgenerness amongst minors*"
- To ensure that LGBTI individuals and organisations, and defenders of LGBTI rights, are able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Contact details

- **Governor of St. Petersburg Georgy Poltavchenko**
fax: +7 (812) 576-78-27
email: gubernator@gov.spb.ru
- **Chairman of the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly Vadim Tulpanov**
fax: +7 (812) 570-35-12
email: vtulpanov@assembly.spb.ru; mvi@assembly.spb.ru
- **Ombudsman in St. Petersburg Alexey Kozyrev**
fax: +7 (812) 572-73-06
email: mail@ombudsmanspb.ru

We hope that you can support us on this issue.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like more information.

Kindest regards

Shabnum Mustapha
Programme Director, Scotland