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Croatia: The state must ensure the right to free assembly and expression

Amnesty International condemns the violence that occurred on Saturday 11 June, which eventually halted the “Different Families, Same Rights” pride march organized in Split, Croatia. Amnesty International is calling for the authorities to immediately investigate the incidents and bring anyone found responsible to justice.

According to one of the march organizers who spoke to Amnesty International, and media reports, at least five Pride participants were injured when counter-demonstrators threw rocks and other objects at them – including one who was hospitalized with a head injury.

Participants report that some counter-demonstrators were detained but the police failed to adequately protect the parade participants from the attacks and the Pride had to be stopped.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights activists organized the march to call for the equal rights of same sex couples and an end to the widespread discrimination the LGBT community suffers in Croatia. This was the first Pride organized in the town of Split in support of LGBT rights.

The Law on Same Sex Partnerships was enacted in Croatia in 2003, but according to the NGOs that organized the Pride, it has done little to reduce the discrimination and abuse LGBT people face. The Pride march's goal was to instigate a debate on discrimination against same-sex couples and to extend the equal rights movement. However, the Pride received no support from Split authorities and a right-wing political party had called for the event to be banned.

Amnesty International urges Croatia to enable everyone to enjoy their full range of human rights. International human rights law states that freedom of expression and assembly extends to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. International human rights law standards also place a positive obligation on states to protect those seeking to peacefully exercise these rights from the threat of violence or disruption. Under international law, Croatia is committed to protect these rights against violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Amnesty International therefore calls on political leaders in Croatia to state publicly and unequivocally that everyone has the right to peacefully demonstrate and express their identity and that anyone trying to violate these rights will be brought to justice. The Croatian police must make clear that discriminatory violence is a criminal offence and will not be tolerated.