



June 24, 2010

Mr. Georgi Parvanov, President of the Republic of Bulgaria

Mr. Boyko Borisov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

Mr. Tzvetan Tzvetanov, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria

Your Excellencies:

I am writing on behalf of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) to voice our concern over the threats and human rights violations faced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities in Bulgaria – particularly from neo-Nazi and far-right groups. After facing considerable opposition in attempts to hold a Pride March in Sofia over the past two years,¹ LGBT activists are attempting to exercise their human rights for a third time at this year's 2010 Pride March, themed "Love Equality, Embrace Diversity." In 2008, activists were met with verbal threats and physical violence at the "Me and My Family" Pride March. Although police protection prevented similar attacks at the "Rainbow Friendship Rally" in 2009, LGBT Bulgarians and their supporters planning to attend this year's march have again encountered the threat of organized violence, intimidation, and discrimination.

We call on you to protect and promote the full enjoyment of human rights by everyone regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In particular we look forward to your leadership in ensuring that Bulgaria protects the rights of LGBT human-rights defenders' to freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and security as required under European and International law.

Neo-Nazi attacks on peaceful citizens continue to escalate and we are distressed to learn from Bulgarian LGBT groups that the government and police force have failed to adequately respond to these attacks and the threats of attacks on this weekend's Pride Parade in Sofia. On March 20 2010, skinheads attacked a peaceful protest by six LGBT activists in Pazardzhik, Bulgaria. While police prevented the skinheads from severely harming the activists, several were injured, and the skinheads continued to yell offensive slogans such as "Out of Pazardzhik" and "Go to Uganda, freaks." In addition to attacks against LGBT citizens, neo-Nazis and far-right groups are reported to have

¹ In 2008, a week before the first LGBT march, the Bulgarian National Alliance (BNA) called for a "Week of Intolerance," with the slogan "be normal, be intolerant." The BNA encouraged other nationalist groups to organize against the right of LGBT Bulgarians and their supporters to march peacefully. This resulted in violence during the march: BNA members and other neo-Nazis threw rocks, Molotov cocktails, and small explosives at the marchers. Many of the attackers, including the head of the BNA, Boyan Rasate, were arrested for the violence surrounding the march. In 2009 neo-Nazi groups once again organized against the march and that this intolerance and potential violence was publicly encouraged by parties in Parliament, such as the Veliko Makedonska Revolucionna Organizacia (VMRO), which characterized LGBT marches as "blackmail" and "strongly oppose[d]" them in an official statement, and Ataka, which called upon Bulgarian men to "beat up the gays."

attacked other peaceful protesters and individuals at three separate instances in the month of June alone.

The media has also failed to accurately report on recent cases of violence, repeatedly describing neo-Nazi attacks on peaceful citizens and protesters as clashes between extremist or anarchist groups. The inattention of the government and the failure of the media to accurately report most cases of violence against LGBT people and other minority groups contributes to the high rates of violence targeting people based on skin color, nationality, sexual orientation, and other marks of difference.

Demonstrations, marches, and other public events are an important exercise of free expression, assembly and association. They are important events for LGBT people and supporters in many parts of the world to claim space in civil society; to draw attention to the human-rights violations regularly confronted by LGBT people; to call for social change. They are also an important opportunity to learn about diversity – including diversity in sexuality and gender identity – and to thus diminish prejudice and misconceptions about LGBT people. By witnessing or taking part in these events, LGBT people who live in fear can regain their confidence, dignity, and hope by taking part in building the community. Attacks against these marches and against participants by those in Bulgaria who wish to destroy this community and the security of LGBT people must be strongly denounced by the government and prevented by the police.

In keeping with European and International Human-rights Law, the Bulgarian government has a duty to protect and ensure the rights and security of its citizens who are exercising their human rights through choosing to participate in these events and Pride Marches. To respect, protect, and fulfill these rights, States must permit LGBT-related demonstrations and must ensure the security of all people voicing their opinion – including in cases where authorization to demonstrate is denied. Furthermore, the government must create and enforce legislation to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes of hate.

We count on your support for ensuring that the rights to security of the person and free expression and assembly of everyone, including LGBT people and their supporters, will be respected and protected.

Sincerely,

Cary Alan Johnson
Executive Director

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission's mission is to advance human rights for everyone, everywhere to end discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. A non-profit, non-governmental organization, IGLHRC is based in New York, with offices in Cape Town and Buenos Aires. www.iglhrc.org

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