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Ecuador: No to “social cleansing” of people because of their sexual orientation

The physical security and integrity of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals (LGBT) in Ecuador must be guaranteed, Amnesty International announced today, in response to recent death threats received by Quitogay, an LGBT human rights organisation.

A homophobic group in Ecuador has announced that in April it will embark upon a campaign of “social cleansing”, directed at the LGBT community which it refers to as “human garbage”.

"These threats are totally unacceptable", Amnesty International declared, recalling that the Ecuadorian Constitution stipulates that all persons shall be considered equal and shall be entitled to enjoy the same rights, liberties and opportunities, without discrimination arising from, inter-alia, their sexual orientation.

Amnesty International is extremely concerned especially since the recent threats join complaints of police ill-treatment of members of the LGBT community.

Reports indicate that on 22nd February this year four transvestites were arrested in Guayaquil by members of the police force operating under the “Plan Mas Seguridad” (Greater Security Plan). They were incarcerated and ill-treated at the Metropolitan Police station. One of the four, known as Talia, was struck with a fire extinguisher and taken to emergency as she had lost consciousness. As soon as she regained consciousness and despite the fact that doctors had advised that she should remain in hospital, she was taken back to the police station where she remained until 24 February.

Another case of ill-treatment occurred in November 2000 when four members of the LGBT community were arrested by Guayaquil police and taken to a bridge where they were beaten up and forced to jump into the Estuario Salado (Salt Lake).

"The Ecuadorian authorities are obligated to take concrete steps to end all ill-treatment and threats directed at people because of their sexual orientation; whether those threats come from homophobic groups or from their own security forces", Amnesty International declared today.

The organisation highlighted that the Legislative framework governing application of the National Human Rights plan decrees that the authorities shall ensure that the national security machinery does not persecute nor harass people because of their sexual orientation.

Background

In November 1997, the Constitutional Court decriminalised homosexuality between consenting adults by annulling Article 516 of Ecuador's Penal Code, citing that the said article prejudiced the Constitution.

On 28 June 2000, the Friends for Life Foundation in Guayaquil organised a march to celebrate gay and lesbian pride. The authorities had granted permission for the event, and three hundred gays, lesbians and transvestites assembled. However, at the meeting point, Guayas' Police Commissioner ordered them to disperse, allegedly on the order of the Governor of Guayas. Reports indicate that approximately 60 police officers surrounded and hurled teargas at the crowd, thus preventing the march from taking place.

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