

CENTRAL ASIA



THE ISSUE:

ACCESS TO EQUAL RIGHTS FOR LGBTI PEOPLE IN CENTRAL ASIA

In the republics of Central Asia, people are under attack for who they love, how they dress, and ultimately for who they are. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) means living with daily discrimination. From name-calling and bullying to being denied a job or appropriate healthcare, the range of unequal treatment faced is extensive and damaging. It can also be life-threatening.

In all too many cases, LGBTI people are harassed in the streets, beaten up, humiliated, tortured and sometimes killed, simply because of who they are. Many live in hiding, some face time in prison in cruel, inhuman, and degrading conditions. Hostility directed at LGBTI people is stoked by the very governments that should be protecting them. Authorities in Central Asia reinforce their power and the status quo by openly justifying discrimination in the name of “morality,” cultural traditions, and religion.

CRIMINALIZING SAME SEX CONSENSUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN MEN

Consensual same sex relations between men remains a criminal offense in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The authorities in both countries have repeatedly stated that they have no intention of decriminalizing consensual sexual relations between men, which constitute a crime under Article 120, punishable by a fine or a prison term of up to two or three years respectively. They argue that any sexual relations other than heterosexual ones contradict cultural traditions and moral norms.

As long as Article 120 is not abolished, members of the LGBTI community remain at extreme risk of persecution and torture. Police regularly detain homosexual or bisexual men and transgender people, threaten them with imprisonment under Article 120, intimidate, physically or sexually abuse them, and use their knowledge of the individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity to blackmail and extort money from them or coerce them into collaboration.

Police officers, prison guards and fellow-inmates will rape detained homosexual and bisexual men with bottles and truncheons, attach heavy water bottles to their genitals, wrap newspaper around their genitals and set the paper on fire. They have the lowest status in prisoner hierarchy and are regularly used as ‘slaves’ by other inmates and guards, forced to clean dirty toilets with their bare hands, for example.

TARGETING LGBTI PEOPLE FOR DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan same-sex consensual relations are not criminalized, but they remain nevertheless highly stigmatized, and LGBTI people are regularly subjected to violence, arbitrary arrests, and discrimination by state and non-state actors.

In Tajikistan, individuals suspected of being LGBTI have been forcibly registered on lists of “amoral crimes, prostitution, and procurement” kept by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The authorities have accused NGOs working with LGBTI people in the context of sexual health of undermining traditional cultural values. The same accusation has been levelled at NGOs providing sexual health advice and HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment programs in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.



In Uzbekistan, gangs of young men have targeted members or suspected members of the LGBTI community in violent attacks in the streets or in their homes, subjecting them to beatings and threats of sexual violence, often stripping them naked and filming the attack and threatening to upload—and often actually posting—the footage on social media.

TALKING POINTS:

- Everyone should be able to feel proud of who they are and who they love. We all have the right to express ourselves freely.
- By embracing LGBTI people and their identities, countries across Central Asia can free everyone to achieve their potential. By standing up for equal rights in Central Asia the United States can lead from the front.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Travel to Central Asia to press officials on human rights. No sitting U.S. President has ever traveled to the five central Asian former-Soviet republics. As China and Russia extend their influence in the region, the incoming administration will face calls to visit the countries and assert U.S. interests. Any visit by the U.S. President must include clear calls to decriminalize consensual sexual intercourse between adult males by abolishing Article 120 in the Criminal Codes of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In all five Central Asian republics, the U.S. President should demand that everyone be protected from discrimination and violence by state and non-state actors alike.
- Consider nominating a member of the LGBTI community to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan and/or Uzbekistan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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