

URGENT ACTION

FAR-RIGHT PROTESTERS ATTACK FESTIVAL ORGANIZERS

The Festival of Equality in Chernivtsi, western Ukraine, was disrupted by violent far-right protesters and conservative religious protesters despite promises made by the National Police to protect the event and guarantee the freedom of peaceful assembly to its participants. The local authorities have not yet publicly commented on the incident.

On 19 May, at about 08:30 am, the organizers of the **Festival of Equality** were notified that the venue of the festival, which was scheduled to start at noon, had been broken into. At around 11:30 am, a group of far-right protesters and conservative religious protesters arrived at the festival's location demanding, with verbal threats, that the organizers cancel the event. After several minutes, the police allowed some of the violent protesters to enter the festival venue and then immediately ordered everyone to evacuate because of an alleged bomb threat. While the organizers were leaving, the protesters outside the venue threw heavy objects at them, including a hammer. The police then put the festival organizers onto a bus and drove them away from the city. They had to change vehicles several times because the police told them that they might have been followed and that they are still in danger.

The Festival of Equality is an annual event, highlighting the rights of LGBT people, as well as focusing on issues of domestic violence and gender-based discrimination.

Amnesty International considers the incident on 19 May in Chernivtsi to be a blatant violation of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. It is a failure by the local police, which was notified in advance about the possible disruption of the event but did not uphold its obligation to guarantee equal rights for all people in Chernivtsi. The Ukrainian authorities must ensure a prompt, effective and impartial investigation is carried out into the use of violence and the threats of violence by the protesters who disrupted the event, the actions of the police, and the alleged bomb threat (some participants in the disrupted event believe that only one of several floors of the event-hosting building was evacuated due to the alleged bomb threat, and question whether the threat was real and not just an excuse to evacuate them and end the event).

Amnesty International will continue to monitor the situation closely and request further action when necessary.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the UA network.

This is the first update of UA 99/18. Further information <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/8424/2018/en/>

Name: Participants and organizers of the Festival of Equality
Gender m/f: all

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