

For Immediate Release

Macedonia: Broaden Anti-Discrimination Bill

Law Should Cover Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

(New York, February 3, 2010) – The Macedonian government’s decision to ignore sexual orientation as a protected category in its draft anti-discrimination law would leave lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) people without vital protection, Human Rights Watch said today in a [letter](#) to Macedonian authorities. Human Rights Watch called on the government to support a comprehensive and inclusive anti-discrimination bill, including protection on the basis of both sexual orientation and gender identity.

The minister of labor and social policy, Xhelal Bajrami, announced the draft law on January 29, 2010. He acknowledged that it deliberately omitted mention of sexual orientation and gender identity, but said that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people could still ask for protection because the draft law refers to “other grounds” of discrimination.

“Silence equals inequality,” said Boris O. Dittrich, advocacy director in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender program of Human Rights Watch. “Vague references to ‘other grounds’ simply aren’t good enough.”

The proposed law does not meet European or broader international human rights standards, Human Rights Watch said.

In the letter, Human Rights Watch refers to international human rights treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, all of which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Macedonia was one of the first countries in Europe to ratify Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation, in “any right set forth by law.” However, Macedonia has not adjusted its domestic law to reflect its international commitments.

In October 2009 the European Commission stated in its progress report on Macedonia that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation persists, and that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have no legal protection against it.

Neighboring jurisdictions, including Albania and Serbia, have amended their laws to bar discrimination based on sexual orientation.

“Leaving people unmentioned in a key new law leaves them unprotected in their daily lives,” said Dittrich. “By including sexual orientation and gender identity in this bill, the government will send a message that equality truly is for everyone.”

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on LGBT rights, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/category/topic/lgbt-rights>

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