



American ideals. Universal values.

March 15, 2016

Ambassador Geoffrey R. Pyatt
Embassy of the United States, Ukraine
4 A.I. Sikorsky St.
04112 Kyiv, Ukraine

Dear Ambassador Pyatt:

I am writing to raise concerns about the possible cancellation of the upcoming Equality Festival in Lviv, Ukraine. Ukrainian LGBT activists and other civil society groups organized the event, scheduled for March 19-20, to “promote the ideas of tolerance, equality and anti-discrimination towards social groups,” including LGBT people, persons with disabilities, stateless migrants, and other populations.

We recently learned that the venue for the event, the Museum of Ideas, has retracted its sponsorship due to threats of violence and property destruction from anonymous groups. A lack of support from the mayor's office in Lviv influenced the museum's decision. The local government's lack of support and silence in the face of threats of violence to Equality Festival Lviv is of serious concern to civil society activists.

As you know, this is not the first instance of threats to events aimed at promoting tolerance and equality, particularly those focused on the rights of LGBT people. In 2014, activists and LGBT groups were forced to cancel what would have been the second-annual LGBT Pride March due to threats from various groups and local authorities' refusal to protect participants. In contrast, 2015 LGBT Pride marked a significant step forward; approximately 1,500 police protected the 250-300 participants. Activists labeled the march a relative success. The recent addition of an anti-discrimination clause in the country's labor code is an additional positive step to advancing the human rights of LGBT citizens and other marginalized groups in Ukraine. In light of these recent successes, the Museum of Ideas' sudden withdrawal from the Lviv Equality Festival and the silence from authorities are of particular concern.

We urge the U.S. Embassy to dialogue with Ukrainian officials to ensure the safety and protection of participants in Equality Festival Lviv 2016. The United States should call on its counterparts to speak out against violence and actively protect the basic rights and freedoms of all citizens. Such steps would ensure that these most recent expressions of intolerance do not result in further marginalization of the country's vulnerable communities, including Ukrainian LGBT people.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact me if Human Rights First can be of assistance as you grapple with these important human rights issues.

Sincerely,

Shawn Gaylord
Advocacy Counsel

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