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STATEMENT

by the

EUROPEAN PRIDE ORGANISERS ASSOCIATION (EPOA)

to the

2006 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 2-13 October 2006

Working Sessions 12:

Fundamental Freedoms II, including Freedom of assembly and association

(10 October 2006)

This statement is presented on behalf of the European Pride Organisers Association (EPOA). EPOA is the European federation of associations organising gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride events and pride parades. EPOA was established in 1991 and has since been licensing the title “EuroPride”, an annual event that is taking place in a different European city every year. All across Europe, LGBT pride marches bring millions of people into the streets to celebrate diversity.

EPOA has addressed the HDIM two years ago and last year denouncing the problems and difficulties LGBT pride organisers had faced in recent years in a couple of cities in OSCE member states such as Croatia, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Serbia. Unfortunately, the situation has not really improved since last year. On the contrary, not only have the city authorities of Riga and Chişinău again banned the planned pride marches this year, but we also have to add Russia to the list of countries where the freedom of assembly of LGBT people has been violated.

In May 2006, “Moscow Pride 06” was banned by the city authorities, and a legal demonstration against this restriction of the right to assemble freely was attacked by a fascist and religious mob. Due to the complete failure of the police forces to protect the legal demonstrators a couple of

them suffered heavy physical injuries as they were beaten up by the counter demonstrators under the eyes of the police. Later, the Moscow prosecutor's office refused to open a criminal case against the man who confessed to have attacked and injured German Bundestag member Volker Beck, a participant in the event.

Two months later, in July, a homophobic mob besieged a hotel in Riga where LGBT activists held a conference au lieu of the banned parade. Earlier that day the mob also had attacked LGBT people leaving a church in Riga where a holy mess was held, thus infringing not only on the freedom of assembly but also the freedom of religion of LGBT people. On both occasions, the people who peacefully assembled in a church and in the private setting of a hotel meeting room were completely left without any protection by the Latvian police forces.

While it seems that the Council of Europe and the OSCE have given up any hope that Russia will ever become a normal European country of which the respect of basic human rights can be expected and for which, therefore, today different standards seem to apply, it is even more frustrating and appalling that an EU member state such as Latvia can behave in the way it does without having to suffer from any consequences. However, for any ordinary and decent EU citizen, the idea that the Latvian minister of the Interior responsible for these appalling incidents in Riga is sitting in the Council of Ministers and has a word to say and can co-decide in EU matters is indeed hard and difficult to bear.

We call upon the OSCE member states to finally put adequate pressure on the countries concerned to force them to not only respect the freedom of assembly of all people but also to guarantee this freedom by protecting them against violent counter demonstrations and hate speech.