

Indian Gay Rights Activists Demand Government Concessions

Hundreds of **gay rights activists** marched through New Delhi on Sunday to demand that they be allowed to lead lives of dignity in India's deeply conservative society.

Dozens of demonstrators carried a nearly 15-meter (50-foot) - long, rainbow-colored banner and waved placards demanding that the government extend the scope of anti-discrimination laws to schools, workplaces and public and private spaces.

Activists said that three years after the Delhi High Court made changes in India's colonial-era law that made gaysex a crime, homosexuals are still not socially accepted in India.

In 2009, the court decriminalized gay sex, which until then had been punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Conservative groups have asked India's top court to overturn the lower court's order, and Supreme Court judges are currently hearing opinions from a range of people, including conservative groups and **gay rights activists**. It's unclear when the court will make a ruling.

"If only the Supreme Court comes out on our side, and if **gay marriage** became legal, what could be better," said Zorian Cross, a New Delhi-based theater actor and playwright at the parade.

"Queer and loving it" and "Give us your support" read some of the placards carried by the activists as they marched to the beat of traditional drums and music. Other supporters distributed badges and rainbow-colored flags and scarves.

The march ended in a public meeting at Jantar Mantar, the main area for protests in the heart of the capital. Many **gay rights**

group members and their families danced and sang as drummers and musicians performed.

Vimal Kumar, an activist with the National Alliance of People's Movements, said the government had to ensure that all forms of discrimination against gays, lesbians and transgenders are ended.

"The government has to listen. Our struggle has gone on for very long, and we are hopeful the government will listen and act on our demands," Kumar said.

Gay rights activists are demanding that the government allow people to record the gender of their choice in the national census, voter identity cards and all other government documents.

"We are demanding that all people be allowed to exercise their right to live their lives with dignity and freedom, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation," said a statement issued by rights groups at the parade.

Kumar said people's attitudes were gradually beginning to change and there was greater understanding among families in urban areas as television campaigns and gay parade marches caught on. But the pace of change is slow, he said.

In some big cities, homosexuality is slowly gaining acceptance, and a few high-profile **Bollywood** films have dealt with gay issues.

Still, many marchers Sunday covered their faces with scarves or wore masks because they have not told their friends and families about their sexuality.

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