

# Priests Break Up Gay Rights Rally Against Homophobia in Georgia

Priests and thousands of other Georgians broke through police barricades and forced gay rights activists to flee on Friday, cutting short their rally to mark the international day against homophobia.

Holding banners saying "Stop Homosexual Propaganda in Georgia!" and "Not in our city!" the demonstrators swarmed into a square in central Tbilisi where about 50 Georgians were rallying in support of gay rights. Police escorted the **gay rights** supporters onto buses and drove them away to avoid violence.

Several people, including some journalists, received minor injuries, Georgian media said.

"We won't allow these sick people to hold gay parades in our country," said Zhuzhuna Tavadze, brandishing a bunch of nettles and adding that she was ready to fight.

"It's against our traditions and our morals."

Later in the evening, rowdy crowds took to the streets and started shouting at people they thought might be homosexual.

Gay rights activists said they were disappointed.

"These people (gay rights demonstrators) should have the right to express their views and to hold demonstrations," said Nino Bolkvadze, a lawyer of the Identity non-governmental organization.

Georgia is a former Soviet republic of 4.5 million people, most of whom are Orthodox Christians. There are only a few

cafes or bars in the capital Tbilisi where gays meet.

On Thursday, the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II, urged authorities not to allow the gay rights rally, saying it was “a violation of the majority’s right” and “an insult” to Georgian traditions. He has previously described homosexuality as an “anomaly and a disease.”

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