



September 6, 2019

Gennady Kernes  
Mayor of Kharkiv  
Constitution Square 7  
61200 Kharkiv  
Ukraine

Dear Mayor Kernes,

We write to you in support of the upcoming Kharkiv Pride, a series of educational human rights events to be held in Kharkiv for the first time from September 10-15. We wish to express our deep concern regarding efforts to restrict the activities of Kharkiv Pride and urge all officials in Kharkiv to respect the rights to free speech and assembly of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community members and their allies and to allow the march and activities to proceed. We also urge you to ensure the safety and security of Pride participants.

This year marks the first time that the community in Kharkiv will be holding Pride events, and organizers have already reported over 600 registered participants. Cities across Ukraine have and continue to hold events in recognition of LGBTQ Pride, including in Kyiv and Odessa. These events demonstrate Ukrainians embrace of greater respect for human rights, freedom and dignity for all people. They have been largely peaceful and successful.

These events are part of Ukraine's larger civil society activities that mark the country's growing commitment to the human rights of all of its citizens and its democratic institutions. This community is organizing in full accordance of the rights guaranteed to them in the Constitution of Ukraine. In fact, the Government of Ukraine has restated its commitment to protect the rights of LGBTQ people and their allies as a member of the Equal Rights Coalition, an international consortium of countries and civil society organizations dedicated to protecting the rights of LGBTQ populations.

Ukrainian and international organizations and governments have committed to supporting Kharkiv Pride, including the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBTQ civil rights organization in the U.S. It has been reported that many of these institutions, including official delegations from the governments of Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, the U.S. and others, will also be in attendance at Kharkiv Pride supporting participants.

We add our voice to the numerous governments and human rights organizations and defenders that have already spoken out against efforts to restrict Kharkiv Pride, including the United Nations in Ukraine and the German Consulate in Donetsk, among others. We urge you to:

- Respect the rights to free speech and assembly of LGBTQ community members and their allies.
- Withdraw your petition to the courts to further restrict the activities of Kharkiv Pride.
- Guarantee the safety and protection of Pride participants.

Pride is a time to celebrate and advocate for the well-being and rights of LGBTQ people. It has a deep and multifaceted meaning to many LGBTQ people and their allies. HRC is proud to support the organizers of Kharkiv Pride as they work to prepare and carry out their planned activities this month.

We therefore urge you to respect the rights to free speech and assembly of LGBTQ community members and their allies and call on your administration to do everything in its power to ensure the security of Pride participants.

Sincerely,



Jay Gilliam  
Director of Global  
Human Rights Campaign

CC: Valeriy Chaly, His Excellency Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States of America