

2 July 2019

North Macedonia: LGBTI rights defender Bekim Asani physically attacked

On 29 June 2019, LGBTI rights defender **Bekim Asani** was threatened and attacked by a group of unknown assailants in Skopje, North Macedonia. Bekim Asani is a chair of the **LGBT United Tetovo Macedonia**.

Bekim Asani is a human rights defender who is working to protect the rights of LGBTI community in North Macedonia. He is also the chair of LGBT United Tetovo Macedonia in the city of Tetovo, an NGO focusing on ensuring protection, promotion and respect for human rights, primarily to LGBTI people, equal access to health care and other vital social and legal services.

On 29 June 2019, about 20 unknown assailants recognised Bekim Asani as a representative of the LGBTI United Tetovo Macedonia and started chasing and threatening him and six other LGBTI rights activists, who were accompanying him, while they were trying to reach the taxi to run away from the aggressors. The group of perpetrators followed the taxis of Bekim Asani and other activists by car. After they managed to stop the taxis, one of the assailants dragged the defender from the car and started hitting Bekim Asani in his head and all over his body while threatening to kill him if he “does not get away from here”. The other activists were also threatened with murder and sexual assault. Three police officers who were nearby were also attacked by the assailants after they tried to intervene. After more police officers arrived and the assailants were eventually arrested, a criminal investigation was opened.

The first Pride Parade in the history of North Macedonia was held in the capital, Skopje earlier the same day as Bekim Asani and other LGBTI activists were attacked. According to the fellow HRDs, more than 1500 activists participated in Skopje Pride. The Parade came as an important step for the LGBTI community as the society of North Macedonia remains conservative and hostile towards its representatives.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned about the physical attack against Bekim Asani as it came as a direct result of his peaceful and legitimate work on protection of the rights of LGBTI community in North Macedonia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in North Macedonia to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into physical attack against Bekim Asani, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards as well as covering all the medical expenses incurred by Bekim Asani in relation to the attack;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Bekim Asani;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders working on LGBTI rights in North Macedonia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect

Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”*.

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Anderson".

Andrew Anderson
Executive Director