

# Charges in Mongolia LGBT attack hint at changing attitudes

*Police bring charges against far-right group after attack on transgender sex worker investigated as a hate crime.*

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Al Jazeera (09.10.2019) – <https://bit.ly/20wKY5R> – Last month, Bosoo Khukh Mongol, a far-right Mongolian nationalist group, teamed up with a local television station to lure a transgender sex worker into a hotel room.

In the room, they threatened her with physical violence and forced her to describe her work on camera.

The video was aired on the evening news and posted on Bosoo Khukh Mongol's Facebook page, alongside incendiary commentary accusing the LGBT community of paedophilia, spreading disease and compromising national security.

Gay and transgender people continue to be the target of harassment and violence in Mongolia, although some progress has been made in recent years.

In 2017, changes were made to the law to provide more protections for the LGBT community as well as better training for law enforcement officials on hate crimes and preventing and prosecuting them.

“Previously, Mongolians had limited knowledge about acceptance of LGBT rights and dignity,” said Tamir Chultemsuren, a political sociologist with the Independent Research Institute of Mongolia, “but now, people have more information... and so general public awareness has improved.”

### **Educating authorities on hate crimes**

The LGBT Center, a Mongolian NGO, began training the police on hate crimes and the implications of the 2017 criminal code after they failed to take action against an officer who assaulted a detained transgender woman.

They have since trained more than 500 police officers, prosecutors, and judges.

Now, the Mongolian police force has guidelines for processing transgender individuals: In police custody, transgender individuals are treated according to the gender they identify as, regardless of their state-issued identification.

“Compared with 2017, I see an improvement, especially from the Crime and Investigation Division,” said Baldangombo Altangerel, the LGBT Center’s legal director who was responsible for overseeing the police training programme.

Following Bosoo Khukh Mongol's harassment of the transgender women last month, the Human Rights Commission of Mongolia submitted a formal request to the police to investigate the incident under the new criminal code.

Mongolian police told Al Jazeera they are investigating the case as a hate crime and, in late September, they brought formal charges against Bosoo Khukh Mongol leader, Gankhuyag Ganzorig. They have not taken action against the TV station.

The woman, who prefers to remain anonymous, has worked with the police and is being treated as a victim, a sign of progress as historically, rape and sexual violence against Mongolia's LGBT community have not been prosecuted.

### **Growing support**

The LGBT Center has been surprised by public reaction to the incident.

Kenna, Youth Programme manager for the LGBT Center, said people had posted messages of support on its social media page.

"I've noticed that people speaking up for LGBT rights has increased," Kenna said, "People are starting to know about the criminal code, anti-discrimination."

In October 2018, Kenna launched the Mongolian Queer Podcast, a well-received podcast which recently completed its third season.

The podcast focuses on providing advice and support, profiling those who are already out and proud to highlight their experiences for others in the community as well as non-LGBT people to underline social support and acceptance.

In 2014, Mongolia's first pride parade was held with only 15 participants; in August of this year, an estimated 250 took part.

On the weekends in the capital Ulaanbaatar, D.D./H.Z., Mongolia's first gay bar, is busy. Zorig Alima, the owner, says his clientele has increased since police raids on the bar stopped after the implementation of the new criminal code.

And his is no longer the only bar in town, with as many as four new places opening in recent years.

## **Discrimination**

While Mongolia's new criminal code has given gender and sexual minorities more protection from hate crimes, Baldangombo says more needs to be done to help them integrate into society.

A 2014 report from the United Nations Development Programme found that a Mongolian from a gender or sexual minority was

more likely to be unemployed and that an LGBT person's perceived risk of falling into poverty doubled when they lived openly.

The situation is even more difficult for Mongolia's transgender population because they can only change their gender on state-issued identification documents after undergoing gender reassignment surgery, which is not available in the country. As a result, they often risk being discriminated against upon submitting their paperwork for employment.

Many transgender people go into sex work – illegal in Mongolia – when they are unable to access formal employment, putting themselves at risk of being harassed or arrested.

Marta Sukh-Ochir, a transgender woman who once worked alongside the woman attacked by Bosoo Khukh Mongol, told Al Jazeera she took up sex work after her family kicked her out and she couldn't afford food or a home.

"I actively looked for other jobs, cashier at a supermarket, receptionist at a hotel, shop assistant...I tried many times, she said. I applied to so many jobs. My gender expression, my appearance – how I looked with long hair, nails, being and acting feminine – was a struggle for employers."

Sukh-Ochir fled Mongolia as a refugee but still worries for the safety of her friend and transgender people back in her homeland.

While life is gradually improving for Mongolia's LGBT community, there are still a number of hurdles to overcome.