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Costa Rica is the latest country to legalize same-sex marriage

By Associated Press

LA Times (26.05.2020) - <https://lat.ms/2A3AXbg> - Costa Rica became the latest country to legalize same-sex marriage Tuesday when a ruling from its supreme court went into effect ending the country's ban.

Couples scheduled ceremonies — mostly private because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but some that would be broadcast — to celebrate their unions before judges and notaries after the ban was lifted at midnight.

Costa Rica is the sixth country in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage, following most recently Ecuador, which allowed it last year. Same-sex marriage is also permitted in some parts of Mexico.

The issue took center stage in Costa Rica's 2018 presidential election after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights earlier that year issued an opinion that countries such as Costa Rica, which had signed the American Convention on Human Rights, had to move immediately to legalize gay marriage.

It helped propel President Carlos Alvarado to victory over an evangelical candidate, Fabricio Alvarado, who had campaigned against it.

In August 2018, Costa Rica's supreme court said the country's ban was unconstitutional and gave the congress 18 months to correct it or it would happen automatically. The Legislative Assembly did not act, so at midnight Monday night the law banning same-sex marriage was nullified.

A campaign celebrating the achievement called "I Do" planned a series of events, including hours of coverage on state television and messages from celebrities, including Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Chile.

Gia Miranda, director of the "I Do" campaign, said coverage would also include historical chapters of the movement in Costa Rica.

"It gives us so much joy," Miranda said. "The only thing that could win with this is Costa Rica and in general love."

She said the end of the ban would help decrease discrimination and make the country more prosperous and attractive to tourists.

Costa Rica lawmakers criticize efforts to delay gay marriage

Costa Rica is set to become the first country in Central America to approve gay marriage.

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (14.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3g9IHsP> - Lawmakers and government officials in Costa Rica on Wednesday chided fellow politicians trying to delay a landmark gay marriage ruling from taking effect, an effort which ended in a punch-up between members of a leading political party.

Costa Rica's constitutional court voted in August 2018 to legalize gay marriage, with the ruling to take effect on May 26 of this year.

The decision made Costa Rica the first country in socially conservative Central America to recognize that right of same sex couples to marry.

On Tuesday, more than 20 lawmakers attempted to introduce a motion to delay the ruling another 18 months, arguing legislators had not had enough time to review the decision because of other issues, including the novel coronavirus.

Rights activists, politicians and government officials say the push from conservatives to delay same-sex marriage detracted from efforts to address the pandemic, given the constitutional court has ruled on the matter.

"There are many other issues that we as a country need to resolve, especially in the face of the emergency we are confronting due to the global pandemic," said Luis Salazar, presidential commissioner for LGBTI population affairs.

"It's a waste of time in the sense that the issue is ... settled," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The dispute came to blows on Tuesday, when deputy David Gourzong of the National Liberation Party (PLN) physically attacked the legal advisor to fellow PLN deputy Gustavo Viales, local media reported.

Gourzong apologized on Twitter late Tuesday, tweeting: "It's clear to me that neither verbal nor physical violence is the way to resolve differences."

Lawmakers would need 38 votes in Costa Rica's 57-member assembly to bring the issue to the top of the agenda; otherwise it is unlikely to be taken up before the May 26 deadline.

Enrique Sanchez, Costa Rica's first openly gay congressman with the center-left Citizens' Action Party, said there was little chance of conservatives gaining the necessary majority.

"It's been a shameful spectacle," he said.

"It gives me peace of mind that this will possibly die from tomorrow, and there will be no going back."

Legalizing gay marriage was a major campaign promise by President Carlos Alvarado Quesada, who took office in 2018.

Rights activists fear that reopening the issue could re-ignite the fierce debate that roiled the election.

"The moment the topic is placed on the table again and the (country's) polarization is exposed, hate speech starts to rise and physical assaults begin," said Margarita Salas, an LGBT+ rights campaigner and president of the VAMOS political party.

"It seems like a reflection of deep homophobia that, in the midst of a pandemic, they want to reopen these issues."

Same-sex marriage has become increasingly accepted in Latin America, with gay couples allowed to marry in Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and parts of Mexico.
