

Moscow Pride Conference: Opening Keynote Speech

Peter Tatchell

Editor's Note: Gay human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell gave the opening keynote speech at the Moscow Pride conference on 26 May 2007. Around 20 lesbian and gay campaigners were arrested. Many were abused, threatened and assaulted. Peter Tatchell was one of more than a dozen Gay Pride participants who were beaten by gangs of neo-Nazis, nationalist extremists and Russian Orthodox fundamentalists, with the apparent collusion of the Moscow police and Russia's elite anti-riot squad, the OMON. For information about Peter Tatchell's campaigns: <http://www.petertatchell.net>.

Greetings!

I bring you a message of comradeship and solidarity from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) human rights organisations OutRage! in London.

Your struggle is our struggle.

The quest for queer freedom is an international quest, in Russia and in all countries.

Gay and lesbian liberation is for all peoples everywhere, not just for some. We cannot accept dignity and rights for queers in Western Europe to the exclusion of queers in Eastern Europe and Russia.

We are in this fight for freedom together.

As long as gay people in Russia are not accepted and respected, we are all diminished in all parts of the world. We are diminished regardless of whether we are gay or straight. An attack on one is an attack on all.

When gay rights are suppressed, it is a loss to the whole democratic and human rights movement. Conversely, when lesbian and gay people win victories, it is a victory for all lovers of freedom and liberty.

TATCHELL | Gay Pride in Moscow

The advance of LGBTI human rights strengthens every struggle for freedom, justice and equality. It expands the democratic space for us all.

This is why it is so important that the LGBTI human rights movement is not separate from the broader human rights movement, but part of it.

It is sad to see some human rights activists here in Russia distance themselves from the LGBTI human rights campaign, and from this weekend's bid to stage the Moscow Pride march.

When human rights activists pick and choose which freedoms to defend, they undermine and compromise the whole human rights agenda. Human rights are universal and indivisible.

That is why I stand shoulder-to-shoulder not only with the Russian LGBTI movement and the organisers of Moscow Pride, but also shoulder-to-shoulder with the human rights activists campaigning to bring justice to the killers of Anna Politkovskaya and other murdered journalists; those campaigning to end the war and torture in Chechnya; and with campaigners against the harassment of environmental activists and the victimisation of democracy activists, like Garry Kasparov.

These different struggles are essentially all the same: they all concern the defence of democracy and human rights against an increasingly authoritarian Russian State and Moscow City Government.

The ban on Moscow Pride is one aspect of a much wider attack on civil society and human rights. In this context of generalised repression, unity and solidarity are the key to winning all these different freedom struggles.

Alone and divided we are weak.

Together and united we are strong.

The ban on Moscow Pride is evidence of a flawed and failed transition from communism to democracy.

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Russia's President and Moscow's Mayor are dragging the country back to autocracy. The right to hold a Moscow Pride march is not just an issue of gay rights, it is an defence of freedom of expression for all Russians, gay and straight.

The fundamental issue is the right to protest.

Together with others, LGBTI people are in the frontline of the struggle to defend the right to freedom of speech and assembly.

We carry the torch of freedom for every Russian of whatever sexuality. Here, this weekend in Moscow, we carry freedom's torch today and we will carry it in the streets of Moscow tomorrow – and beyond – until the rights of LGBTI Russians are won and respected.

My message to President Putin and Mayor Luzhkov is this: Queer freedom has been long delayed but it cannot be denied.

Spacibo (thank you).

Peter Tatchell is a human rights campaigner and left-wing member of the Green Party.