

IHF FOCUS: Freedom of expression; judicial system and domestic safeguards; torture, ill-treatment and misconduct by law enforcement officials; conditions in prisons and detention facilities; death penalty; right to privacy; conscientious objection; protection of ethnic minorities; citizenship; intolerance, xenophobia, racial discrimination and hate speech; protection of asylum seekers and refugees; women's rights; rights of the child; rights of homosexuals; rights of the handicapped and mentally ill.

In Latvia the primary human rights concerns in 1999 were the lengthy pre-trial detention of minors, encroachments on freedom of expression, as well as the government's failure to allocate sufficient funding to ensure smooth implementation of social integration policy, thereby threatening recent progress in the realm of minority rights. On the positive side, 1999 saw the abolition of the death penalty, the opening of a new involuntary commitment facility for mental patients who have committed serious crimes and a significant increase in the naturalization rate of Latvia's large population of stateless "non-citizens".

Freedom of Expression and the Media

In two cases, freedom of the media was questioned and new legislation provided for severe penalties for defamation.

■ In a case with far-reaching implications for freedom of expression, former Minister of Economics Laimonis Strujevics sued the daily newspaper *Diena* (The Day) for defamation. At issue were a series of seven editorials written in 1998 by commentator Aivars Ozolins. Ozolins had expressed the

opinion that Strujevics had acted in the interest of several Ventspils-based oil transit companies to the detriment of the state budget. The Riga Zemgale district court ruled on 26 October in favour of Strujevics and ordered *Diena* to rescind parts of its editorials and to pay Strujevics 7000 lats (U.S.\$ 12,000) in damages. *Diena* appealed the case, which could have a chilling effect on journalistic criticism of politicians.

■ In another controversial case, on 12 March Tatyana Chaladze, former editor of the now-defunct *Baltiskoe Vremya* (Baltic Times), was arrested for contempt of court as she entered Latvia at the Meitene border crossing point. Chaladze, who had not lived in Latvia for several years, had been sued for defamation in 1992 by former Latvian Communist Party leader Alfreds Rubiks. At issue was an article in a 1992 edition of *Baltiskoe Vremya* which suggested that Communist Party funds had been stolen and deposited in a Swiss bank. On 15 April the Riga Central district court acquitted Chaladze and she was released from custody.

The new criminal code that went into effect on 1 April foresaw very severe penalties for defamation. For example, article 158 holds that "The punishment for impugning someone's honor or defamation in the mass media is deprivation of liberty for a period up to one year or detention, or community service or a monetary fine up to 30 minimal monthly wages." This was in stark contradiction to the 1999 Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, article 28 paragraph H of which notes in regard to defamation that "penal sanctions, in particular imprisonment, should never be applied."

¹ Based on the *Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, Human Rights in Latvia in 1999*, prepared by Nils Muiznieks, Angelita Kamenska, Ieva Leimane, and Sandra Garsvane

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Access to Information

In August the Cabinet of Ministers adopted implementing regulations for the 1998 Law on Access to Information laying out how state institutions must release information at their disposal. Rather than facilitating access to information, the regulations further restricted such access by providing additional justifications for not releasing information: if the author is another institution or if the information has already been published.

Judicial System and Domestic Safeguards

On 1 April, a contradictory new criminal code entered into force. On the positive side, new features included the possibility of replacing criminal liability with a process of victim-offender conciliation, the possibility of a shortened court procedure in the event of an admission of guilt, and the more frequent availability of alternative punishments, including community service, fines, etc. However, the code also foresaw very harsh penalties, which was especially troubling in cases that affected freedom of expression and children.²

A new law on civil procedure entered into force on 1 March. Article 9 of the old civil procedure code permitted the use of minority languages in court proceedings and documentation "if both sides, their representatives and the prosecutor agree," as well as guaranteed the services of a translator in the case. While article 13 of the new law continued to guarantee the services of a translator, it also required any documentation not in Latvian to be submitted with a certified translation. While this law conforms to international standards, its impact will be to make civil trials less accessible to many minorities. A similar provision was included in the new

State Language Law adopted on 9 December, article 10 of which stipulates that, except in emergencies, state and municipal agencies and courts received documents only in the state language or with a notarized translation into Latvian. This law, which enters into force on 1 September 2000, will render state bodies and public services less accessible to minorities.³

In 1999, the National Human Rights Office (NHRO), a government ombudsman-like body, did not fully recover from a management and political crisis that had paralyzed it over the second half of 1998. A majority of the parliament voted on 29 April not to remove director Olafs Bruvers from office. Several NHRO employees who had been in positions of conflict of interest left the staff in early 1999. In mid-March 1999 the NHRO formed an advisory council consisting of representatives from human rights NGOs, international organizations working in Latvia and the Supreme Court. However, despite regular meetings, at the end of the year the advisory council was still struggling to define its role (or have it defined by the NHRO). Symptomatic of its problems was its inability to elect a chairperson. By year's end the NHRO had yet to regain the public trust and political clout it had previously enjoyed, a task that would be complicated by a significant decrease in funding and ensuing staff cuts and suspended projects.

Torture, Ill-Treatment and Misconduct by Law Enforcement Officials

A delegation of the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited Latvia from 24 January to 3 February 1999. The convention entered into force for Latvia on 1 June 1998. The delegation inspected a number of police

² See *Freedom of Expression and the Media and Rights of the Child*.

³ See *Protection of Ethnic Minorities*.

stations, prisons, and mental hospitals and drafted a report on its findings. It is to be hoped that the Latvian government will make the report public in 2000.

1999 witnessed an increase in the frequency with which police used firearms against civilians, sometimes with lethal consequences.

■ In a 13 March incident, an Ogre traffic police officer shot in the head and killed a 20-year-old who had exceeded the speed limit and fled from the police.

■ The following day in Riga, a police officer shot and killed a youth holding a toy pistol after he refused to heed a demand to throw it down.

■ On 20 March, a Riga traffic police officer seriously wounded a driver in the head after the person failed to obey the officer's command.

■ On 27 March, Dairis Filipovs, an officer of the security police in Jelgava, while under the influence of alcohol shot and killed two persons and wounded three others. In this case, the officer was found guilty and given a twenty-year prison sentence. After an internal investigation, five officials were punished: the chief of the security police received a reprimand, the direct superior of the accused was demoted, two persons received a warning about their unfitness for duty, and another received a reprimand.

Conditions in Prisons and Detention Facilities

In 1999 the prison population declined slightly from the previous year to 8,815 or 354 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants (in 1998: 395 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants). Despite this positive trend, a rise in the share of pre-trial prisoners (41.3 percent) led to significant overcrowding in pre-trial detention prisons like the Central

Prison (129 percent and Liepaja Prison (124 percent). In view of the lengthy period of time some individuals spend in pre-trial detention (up to 2–3 years), the complete absence of any purposeful activity and harsh restrictions on contacts with the outside world are unjustifiable. While the new criminal law allows prisoners sentenced to a term up to two years to be transferred to open prisons, implementation of this provision led to serious overcrowding in the Vecumnieki Prison (200 percent) and Olaine Prison (158 percent).

The widespread incidence of tuberculosis in prisons continued to remain a serious concern, especially the high share of patients with multi-drug resistant TB. In 1999 the number of ill prisoners declined from 536 to 361. It is unclear whether this is due to the introduction of the DOTS (directly observed therapy, short-course) program or the release of ill prisoners. In 1999 the number of HIV positive prisoners increased to almost 100 cases. Although a number of international instruments call for ensuring confidentiality about the identity of AIDS patients, the transport by convoy of prisoners for medical examinations to the State Infectious Disease AIDS ward threatens this confidentiality.

As of 1 January 2000, the prison system was transferred from the Interior Ministry to the Ministry of Justice. While an inter-ministerial work group to oversee the transfer was created as early as May 1998, by the end of 1999 a number of problems remained unresolved. For example, soldiers continued to guard 7 of 15 prisons.

Right to Privacy

A number of cases in which media outlets violated the right to privacy came to light in 1999.

■ After the 14 December issue of the Cesis region newspaper *Druva* described incidents of vandalism in the area, it also pub-

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lished the names and home addresses of those who had been found guilty of the crimes.

■ For several years, the Ogre city newspaper *Ogres vestis*, for its part, had published the names, home addresses and the amount city residents who owed in back rent.

Such actions violated the law “On the Press and Other Means of Mass Information” and Latvia’s Code of Journalistic Ethics, as well as the right to privacy as enshrined in article 17 of the ICCPR and article 8 of the ECHR.

Conscientious Objection

Legislation in force in 1999 did not permit conscientious objection or alternative military service. According to the Law on Obligatory Military Service in force until December 1999, ordained clergymen from confessions represented in the military chaplain’s service were exempt from military service. However, the Jehovah’s Witnesses were not represented in this body.

■ In March and April, Vladimirs Gama-junovs and Romans Nemiro submitted a request to a Riga court to rescind a decision of the Defense Ministry’s Military Recruitment Commission regarding their conscription into the Latvian armed forces. Both individuals were Jehovah’s Witnesses and the former was a clergyman. Both individuals invoked article 99 of the constitution, which guaranteed freedom of thought, conscience and religion and article 9 of ECHR. In his 6 May reply to the Jehovah’s Witnesses Riga Congregation, Defense Minister Girts Kristovskis acknowledged that “One could agree that in the current situation not conscripting Jehovah’s Witnesses into obligatory military service (which is not possible under existing laws) would not cause any fundamental losses to Latvia’s army and alternative

solutions in legislation should be permitted.” On 25 August, the Riga Vidzeme district court rejected both complaints against the Military Recruitment Commission and on 13 September both plaintiffs appealed, though at the end of 1999 a hearing date had not yet been set.

Three similar cases were brought before the same court. As two of the five cases involve ordained clergymen and are likely to be withdrawn, as on 20 December 1999 the parliament passed amendments to the Law on Obligatory Military Service exempting clergymen in confessions registered at the Ministry of Justice or persons studying in religious seminaries. However, the parliamentary Commission on Defense and Internal Affairs rejected a draft amendment permitting conscientious objection.

Protection of Ethnic Minorities

The government engaged in a wide-ranging dialogue with minorities in the spring after it launched a draft Framework Document for a National Program on the Integration of Society on 10 March. The document laid out the goals and means of minority policy on topics such as education, language, citizenship, etc. After the public debate, revisions and some delays, the Cabinet of Ministers finally approved the document in mid-December, thereby enshrining integration as state policy and laying the groundwork for the creation of a multi-year government integration program with state budget funds. However, the parliament did not allocate any funds in the 2000 budget for continuing work on integration policy.

The parliament adopted a new state language law on 9 December that will enter into force on 1 September 2000. In July, the president had vetoed an initial version of the law and sent it back to parliament for revision, claiming that it violated international norms governing freedom of expression and the sanctity of private life.

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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoep has judged the 9 December version of the law to be “essentially in conformity with Latvia’s international obligations and commitments.”

However, the law leaves a large margin of legal uncertainty, as a number of the most important provisions are left for decision by the executive branch. For example, the Cabinet of Ministers will decide the level of Latvian language proficiency required of state officials and private individuals whose work affects legitimate public interests (article 6), which public events organized by non-state agencies may be required to provide translation into Latvian (article 11), and which public information can be presented in a foreign language alongside Latvian (article 21).

The law also stipulates that government bodies will receive documents only in the state language⁴ or with a notarized translation into Latvian. Heretofore, documents could be submitted in Russian, German and English as well. This new provision will not only generate hardship for many minorities, but also place an additional hurdle to accession to the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which Latvia signed in 1995, but had not ratified as of the end of 1999. A further barrier to ratification will be article 18 of the law, which calls for place names to be used only in the state language.

At the same time, the National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT) continued to make progress in assisting minorities to learn Latvian, eliciting their participation, and engaging them in a process of dialogue. In the summer, the NPLLT alone and in cooperation with the Soros Foundation – Latvia organized 26 summer language and integration camps. Moreover, in 1999 the NPLLT continued to train mi-

nority professionals whose career opportunities were threatened by poor Latvian skills, including minority teachers, medical professionals, Interior Ministry staff (police, fire fighters, prison guards), railway workers, as well as various marginalized groups, such as prisoners and disabled persons. In 1999 the NPLLT worked closely with the media, creating radio programs and video films.

Citizenship

Amendments to the Law on Citizenship approved in a referendum on 3 October 1998 came into force in 1999, leading to a large jump in the naturalization rate of Latvia’s 600,000 stateless “non-citizens.” On 2 February, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted implementing regulations regarding the procedure for registering stateless children as citizens of Latvia and the testing procedure for physically disabled persons. The abolition of the age timetable or “window system,” which had prevented many qualified applicants from naturalizing, led to an increase in applications to a monthly average of more than 1,500 at year’s end. In 1999, 12,429 persons received citizenship by naturalization, which is more than the combined total of the previous four years. In order to do away with the long queues that had formed and to cut down the time lag between the moment of application and the receipt of citizenship, in April the government allocated additional funding to expand the staff of the Naturalization Board, the bureaucracy which administers the law. However, at year’s end, the parliament failed to allocate the requisite funds to the Naturalization Board in the 2000 budget. Unless budget amendments are adopted, staff will have to be cut in early 2000.

By year’s end more than 73,000 non-citizens had not changed their Soviet pass-

⁴ See *Judicial System and Domestic Safeguards*.

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ports for non-citizen passports and risked remaining without valid identity documents. In a move welcomed by human rights defenders, at the end of the year the government extended the deadline for the expiration of the validity of USSR passports from 31 December 1999 to 31 March 2000.

On 18 February 1999 the Saeima (parliament) adopted a law "On the Status of a Stateless Person in Latvia." The law regulated the status of several dozen people who could not qualify for refugee status or acquire a non-citizen's passport under the 1995 law "On the Status of Those Citizens of the Former USSR Who Are Not Citizens of Latvia or Any Other State." On 24 August, the cabinet adopted implementing regulations and since then, according to information provided by the Citizenship and Migration Affairs Board, six persons have officially been recognised as stateless.

Intolerance, Xenophobia, Racial Discrimination and Hate Speech

The activities and published statements of extremist groups and individuals continued to evoke concern in 1999, as they often included veiled appeals to violent action.

■ Issue 4 of the bi-monthly newspaper *Latvietis Latvija* (A Latvian in Latvia) contained an article in which the author bemoaned the humiliation experienced by Latvians who have to work for companies owned by Russians. He asserted that "the solution is not to befriend or coddle up to these enemies, but to engage in a struggle against them." Further, the same author noted that "Not because of a pretty life do youth in Germany beat Turks, in the Czech Republic and Poland – Gypsies, and everywhere, of course – blacks and Asians. They are even more harmful and unpleasant than Russians. Unfortunately,

because of the harmful policies of the government they will soon be here in Latvia as well." Issue 21 contained an article urging the military to "raise up their weapons" and act, "to drive out with fists the "vanderstoels" [referring to Max van der Stoel, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities] who have come to destroy our people and land." That same issue contained an article stating that "the large number of mentally disabled seriously threatens the gene pool of the Latvian nation. For this reason we cannot allow the mentally ill to have children."

■ In a bizarre anti-Semitic incident, the editor of the mainstream daily *Neatkarīga Rīta Avīze* (Independent Morning Newspaper) Juris Laksovs in a brief article in the 8 April edition called the American Academy of Motion Pictures "a bunch of crazy kikes who have pissed all over themselves." The following day an unrepentant Laksovs resigned from his post.

The statements of some Russian-oriented extremists have also continued to evoke concern.

■ At the end of May, three youths were briefly detained for writing the following slogan in enormous letters on a Riga wall: "Killing a Latvian is the same thing as planting a tree. Let's make Latvia greener!"

■ The unofficial organization Russian National Unity (followers of Barkashov) put out one issue of a newsletter called *Russkaya ataka* (Russian attack) in January in which it called itself an organization of "Russian nationalists," an "active, decisive, uncompromising organization with military discipline" one of whose goals is "putting in their place the uppity 'younger brothers' in the former national territories."

■ Issue No. 10 of the newsletter of the unofficial National Bolshevik Party *General'naya liniya* (The General Line) urged something more than moral support

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for the Serbs during the Balkan War: "In order to help the Serbs it is not necessary to go to Yugoslavia ... Vietnam on every corner. Yugoslavia on every corner." Adjacent to these slogans was a picture of a man holding a Molotov cocktail. Members of both Russian National Unity and the National Bolshevik Party were on numerous occasions detained briefly and received fines for disturbing the peace, violating regulations on holding protests, resisting arrest, etc.

In an incident at a café-bar in the town of Talsi on 16 July 1999, home guard Imants B. denied entry to Mr. C, a youth of Roma origin. According to Mr. C, Imants B. stated in the presence of witnesses that the owner had ordered no Roma to be allowed entry, though Imants B. subsequently denied this and claimed that Mr. C was not let in because he "looked suspicious." The incident made national news and the café owner made a public apology for the "misunderstanding." After a request by the National Human Rights Office (NHRO), the Home Guard's G-2 Administration conducted an investigation and absolved Imants B. of all wrongdoing. In a letter to the NHRO, Home Guard headquarters provided a bizarre excuse: "As the mother of Mr. B. is a Russian and one of his father's parents is Roma, it is doubtful that any discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin could have taken place on the part of Imants B. (...) While guarding Café K.A.I. on 16 July 1999, 41st Home Guard Battalion reserve officer Mr. B. acted according to the café's internal regulations... the café's internal regulations were worked out by the owner, who would then also bear responsibility for conflicts based upon them."

In 1999, Latvia submitted its combined initial, second and third periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

After reviewing these reports in August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination issued its concluding observations.⁵ The committee expressed concern about the fact that no case of dissemination of ethnic hatred had been brought to justice; the slow rate of naturalization; the maintenance of the ethnicity entry in passports; and the difficulties experienced by some non-citizens without valid passports.

Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

At the beginning of 1999 the new Refugee Reception Center at Mucenieki was officially opened and by the end of the year housed six asylum seekers and five refugees. As of the end of 1999, only a total of six people had officially been granted refugee status in Latvia.

Despite the small numbers, the first persons to who had acquired refugee status already encountered problems integrating into Latvian society. The Mucenieki facility is not designed for permanent residence, but the refugees faced difficulties in obtaining a residency registration permit (the old Soviet *propiska*) to live elsewhere. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development has offered primarily apartments far from Riga or with utility debts that the new inhabitants would have to pay. Moreover, according to current legislation, it was impossible for refugees to acquire Latvian citizenship through naturalization.

In 1999 Latvia participated in the "PHARE Horizontal Program on Justice and Home Affairs, Joint Support Program on the Application of the EU Acquis on Asylum and Related Standards and Practices in the Associated Countries of Central Europe and the Baltics." The ten-country project, which aims to harmonize asylum law, led

⁵ CERD/C/55/Misc. 39/Rev. 4

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to the preparation of draft legislative amendments in Latvia introducing so-called "B" or subsidiary forms of protection and accelerated procedures, as well as doing away with the notion of a "safe country of origin" and "safe third country."

Conditions in the Gaizina Street detention center for illegal immigrants continued to evoke concern, as the 35 inhabitants carried out a hunger strike in April 1999. A number of the inhabitants were held in the facility for more than one year. In the 23 April edition of the newspaper *Rigas Bals*, Interior Ministry spokesman Normunds Belskis stated that "the Minister admits that the living conditions in these places [the Gaizina St. facility and the Olaine facility] do not meet European standards, but budget limitations prevent these problems from being resolved in a week's or a month's time."

The Death Penalty

On 15 April, with 64 votes "for", 14 "against" the Saeima voted to abolish the death penalty by ratifying Protocol 6 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Protocol 6 entered into force in Latvia on 1 June. With this move, Latvia finally fulfilled a commitment it made upon gaining entry into the Council of Europe in 1995. Now, parliament must amend the criminal law to bring national legislation into line with Protocol 6.

Women's Rights

On 1 January, the Ministry of Welfare appointed an official responsible for gender equality issues. By the end of 1999, this official had coordinated several research projects, but the office's work had yet to gain public attention.

On 17 June Vaira Vike-Freiberga was elected president of Latvia by a majority of parliamentary deputies. Vike-Freiberga, a

former citizen of Canada who returned to Latvia only in 1998, became Latvia's first woman head of state and the first woman president in Eastern Europe.

In October the Crisis Center "Skalbes" organized a week-long telephone campaign during which women who had suffered domestic violence could call in for free and receive advice. During the campaign more than 230 women or an average of 25 to 30 per day sought assistance. Seventy-two percent of the callers said they were victims of violence and 25 percent said they had been threatened. The heightened attention of the media during the phone-in campaign finally brought the issue of violence against women into the public light.

Rights of the Child

On 11 August and 29 September Latvia signed respectively the European Convention on Adoption of Children and the European Convention on Recognition of Decisions and Enforcement of Decisions Concerning Custody of Children and Restoration of Custody of Children. Ratification and implementation of these instruments could facilitate a restoration of public confidence in the overseas adoption of children from Latvia.

In May 1999, there were 43 minors in detention facilities who had already been incarcerated for more than a year. At the end of 1999 one youth born in 1982, who was imprisoned in 1996, continued to be held in prison, where he had already spent three-and-a-half years. Another minor has been held in detention since December 1996. This is in stark violation of article 37 part b. of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that "the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time." This problem may be compounded by the provisions of the new criminal law, whereby persons who have reached the

age of 14 at the time a crime is committed can be held criminally liable. Hitherto children could only be held criminally liable from the age of 14 for serious crimes, but for other crimes only after reaching the age of 16.

In 1999 there were several well-publicized cases involving violence against children both in the school and in the family.

■ On 10 October, Linda V., a music teacher at Talsi Secondary School No. 2, invited her husband, home guard sergeant Andris V., into the classroom to assist in disciplining four students. Andris V. inflicted light bodily injuries on two of the youth. Linda V. was released from her job at the school, but she sued the school to be reinstated in her position.

■ On 3 November, deputy director of the Bergi primary School Imants V., having discovered an eight-year old pupil playing with matches, hit him in the face several times, cracking his lip and bloodying his nose.

■ In another case in early December, Vanda K., a teacher at Jurmala Secondary School No. 1, dragged a disobedient student out of the classroom by his collar, hit him in the face and kicked him. In neither of the two latter cases was any disciplinary action taken against the perpetrators of violence.

■ In December, the Zemgale district court acquitted Nikolai K., who had "disciplined" his four-year-old son so severely as to leave him hospitalized for several weeks. In its verdict, the court ruled that "spanking with a belt cannot be considered violence against the victim... The father's intent was not towards cruelty or violence against the child..." The Zemgale district court prosecutor has protested the acquittal in the Senate of the Supreme Court, which had not ruled on the case by the end of the year.

Rights of Homosexuals

In 1999 the National Human Rights Office submitted to parliament a draft law on registering single sex partnerships, which the parliament rejected. The inability to register such partnerships affects not only the right to inheritance, guardianship, but also a number of other rights, such as the ability to request residency status for a partner.

■ In November Mr. A, who is a citizen of Latvia, turned to the Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies with a complaint about the impossibility of arranging for a Latvian residence permit for his long-term partner, who is a citizen of the United Kingdom. The Citizenship and Migration Affairs Board rejected the request, as the 1992 law on "On the Entry and Residence of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Latvia" envisages the right to request such a permit only for different sex partners.

In December, in a sign of growing intolerance towards homosexuality, a new NGO called "For a Latvia Free of Homosexuality" was created. In the 21 December 1999 issue of the newspaper *Neatkarīga Rīta Avīze* (Independent Morning Newspaper), the leader of the organization Andris Baumanis noted that "Homosexuals are carriers of death and undermine our demography." In the same article, Head of the Riga Children's Rights Protection Center Janis Gulbis suggested that homosexuality can be "cured" and that women who wear pants promote the spread of homosexuality.

Rights of the Handicapped and Mentally Ill

A new involuntary commitment facility for mental patients who have committed serious crimes began to accept patients in April. The facility can accommodate 60 persons. Hitherto such patients had been held in either regular mental hospitals,

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where they posed a potential danger to others, or in the hospital of the Riga Central Prison.

Conditions in the Ilgi special social care center for persons with mental disabilities continued to evoke concern in 1999. Though the Ministry of Welfare reviews failed to note any serious violations, official information suggested a history of problems. In 1998 the facility, which held approximately 300 patients, had 12 cases of tuberculosis and one death from the disease. Overall 62 patients died over the course of 1998 and 41 in 1999. While the center's administrators attributed the alarming death rate to a flu epidemic, the most frequent diagnosis in medical documentation was heart failure. The Ilgi facility had among the highest patient death rates of any of Latvia's 25 social care centers but other problems plagued the facility as well: The patients had limited access to telephones and the only regular contact with the outside world was a monthly visit by a priest. ■■■