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Ukraine: Amnesty International welcomes successful protection by police of 8 March 2019 women’s rights rallies

Amnesty International welcomes the improved efforts by law enforcement authorities to prevent attacks against participants marching in women’s rights rallies held on 8 March 2019 in seven Ukrainian cities: Kyiv, Uzhgorod, Lviv, Kharkiv, Odessa, Mariupol and Zaporizhia.

Law enforcement officers successfully prevented violent attacks that marred similar rallies in 2018.

According to the Ozon civic monitoring group, the Women’s March in Kyiv was attended by 1,300 people, with around 100 counter-protesters. The event was protected by 900 law enforcement officers. The National Police of Ukraine has stated that two persons were detained after they tried to “initiate a fight” and another after throwing a pyrotechnical device into the marching crowd; the police have not provided further information about the detention of these three persons and Amnesty International is not aware of violence committed at women’s rights rallies in other cities.

In Uzhgorod, representatives of Amnesty International Ukraine, Sweden and the USA joined a rally organised by human rights defender Vitalina Koval, who was subjected to violence from far-right groups in 2017 and 2018 while participating in women’s rights events. The lack of prompt and effective investigations into these past attacks against Koval had fuelled concerns that she could be at risk of another attack.

To mitigate the risk, Amnesty International met with representatives of the National Police of Ukraine and other local and national authorities ahead of Koval’s rally. Approximately 100 law enforcement officers secured the safety of rally participants in Uzhgorod.

In 2018 Amnesty International documented widespread use of violence by far-right groups against peaceful demonstrators who took to the streets to mark International Women’s Day. The attacks took place during and following demonstrations in Kyiv, Lviv, Uzhgorod and elsewhere.