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Group of Masked Men Attacks Gay Club

By Ezekiel Pfeifer

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A police officer standing in the 7freedays club after a raid there Thursday evening.

Police started an inquiry Friday to identify a group of men who wreaked havoc in a Moscow gay club — attacking clubgoers, overturning tables and throwing bottles — which left four people hospitalized and others injured.

Police began to receive phone calls around 9:30 p.m. Thursday night from people saying a group of aggressive young men had entered the club 7FreeDays, located in a basement on Milyutinsky Pereulok in central Moscow, and started a fight, an unspecified police official told Interfax.

The club, which on its website describes itself as the "first gay- and lesbian-friendly bar in Russia," was holding an event in honor of international Coming Out Day. Police arrived at the club after the agitators had fled the scene.

Police plan to study videos from nearby surveillance cameras, RIA-Novosti reported, but the attackers might be hard to identify because, for privacy reasons, there were no cameras inside

the club.

Four people were hospitalized, the news agency said.

Unspecified police officials told Lifenews.ru that the attackers were dressed in dark clothes and surgical masks and that many of them had shaved heads.

A man in the club at the time of the attack told the online tabloid that acid was thrown on him. Other witnesses told the NTV television channel that a group of about 20 attackers struck clubgoers repeatedly over the course of five to six minutes, turned over tables and threw bottles, then fled.

“First I thought it was part of the show. ... A bit later we realized it was not a show, but an attack,” witness Pavel Samburov told the channel.

The injured included a woman who was rushed to a hospital with a punctured eye after her glasses were smashed to pieces, NTV reported.

The attackers held the bartender at gunpoint, forced her face down on the floor, and started smashing the bar, Human Rights Watch said in a statement on Friday. About 70 people were at the party that evening, the statement said. It called on Russian authorities to investigate the attack.

Earlier last week, the People's Council, a nationalist Orthodox group, called for the closure of all gay clubs in Moscow as part of an effort to prohibit the "promotion of homosexuality."

The People's Council said Moscow lawmakers should follow the example set by their counterparts in St. Petersburg and other Russian cities, where the "promotion of homosexuality to minors" had already been banned.

Moscow has about a dozen gay or designatedly gay-friendly bars and clubs, according to various Internet listings. No one has claimed responsibility for the Thursday attack.

Gay rights leader Nikolai Alexeyev said in a commentary piece on Gayrussia.eu that he thought the attack took place because the perpetrators felt they would not be punished.

"The main reason for what happened is the feeling of complete impunity of the people who commit such crimes, which must be considered hate crimes — in this case, hate crimes against those who love others," Alexeyev wrote.

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