Is the Orlando Shooting a Terrorist Act or Another One of Many Anti-LGBT Attacks Nationwide?

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At press time, in the wake of the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history, news reports suggest the gunman who opened fire at a nightclub in Orlando this past weekend, may have targeted the location because he harbored antigay views. The attack that killed at least 50 people and injured more than 53 others hasn't yet been called a hate crime by federal authorities. But many advocates caution that the shooting comes in the midst of a "crisis" level of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people across the United States, news site Mic reports.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, more than 250,000 Americans were the victims of hate crimes between 2007 and 2011, the last year for which data is available. In 2011, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs' researchers also published a report that noted a 23 percent increase in murders of LGBT and HIV-positive people in the United States. What's more, statistics show that LGBT and HIV-positive people are disproportionately the targets of hate crimes in this country, far surpassing attacks in which race, national origin or religion is considered to be a motivating factor.

In addition, advocates emphasized that the tragedy occurred in the midst of Pride month, which is celebrated in the United States every June to promote the visibility of LGBT people and raise awareness of the discrimination, violence and health issues that disproportionately affect this population.

Last weekend, the police in Los Angeles also arrested a man they found with guns and ammunition in his car who was allegedly planning to attend the city's annual Pride parade. Luckily, that potential attack was thwarted before anything could happen.

"This is a bit of a crisis situation," said Heidi Beirich, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project (SPLC), referring to the antigay attack shortly after it happened. Later, the SPLC stated, "While the full facts are still unknown, unfortunately it is not surprising that the LGBT community was targeted."

Click here to read more about the increase of hate crimes against same-gender-loving people.

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