

Headline	Anti-gay marriage protesters rally in Paris		
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Anti-gay marriage protesters rally in Paris

PARIS: Thousands of Catholics and other opponents of French government plans to legalise gay marriage and same-sex adoption marched in Paris on Sunday, a day after more than 100,000 turned out across France for the cause.

The rally, organised by conservative Catholic group Civitas, was marred by accusations that protesters had roughed up journalists and topless counter-protesters partially dressed as nuns.

Police said some 9,000 people had joined the protest, rallying behind slogans such as one large banner reading: "France needs children, not homosexuals."

Civitas official Alain Escada said gay marriage was "a Pandora's box" that would let others demand extended marriage rights, including polygamists and incestuous people.

"Our objective is to wage a real battle to protect the family and child," said Escada, whose group claims 1,200 members and a network of some 100,000 supporters.

Senior members of the far-right National Front also took part in the rally.

The protesters included several young people wearing cassocks, a Christian clerical garment. Others

waved the French flag and banners depicting the Christian cross and other emblems.

Bertrand de la Buharaye, a pensioner from Dinan in northern France who came to the rally on a Civitas chartered bus, said: "A child cannot flourish normally without a father and a mother. It's against nature."

Besides the opponents of the bill, a dozen topless activists from the Ukrainian-based women's movement Femen had shown up to stage a counter-protest dressed as nuns and chanting "humorous" slogans, said French feminist writer and columnist Caroline Fourest.

"When they moved toward the demonstrators, some of (the protesters) ran after them, raging," Fourest said in a phone call with AFP from a police wagon, where the women had been taken for their own safety.

She claimed the women were hit by their pursuers, who also lashed out at journalists filming the scene.

Several photographers were roughed up, an AFP photographer said. The local police station said officers had made five arrests.

President Francois Hollande's

government and its allies sharply criticised the aggression.

French Socialist party first secretary Harlem Desir denounced it as "stupid", and government spokeswoman Najat Vallaud-Belkacem said authorities would take a zero-tolerance stance on violence.

"There is no place for the extreme right's acts of aggression in our country," Vallaud-Belkacem said. "The government will show no tolerance for this violence."

Family Minister Dominique Bertinotti said violence was "intolerable" and went against French values.

"We cannot tolerate violence, homophobic sentiments, they are punishable under the law," the minister said on Europe 1 radio.

She also spoke out against what she called "counter-truths" advanced by opponents of the bill.

"(The idea) that there will no longer be any reference to father or mother in the civil code is completely false," she said.

"We are not substituting one kind of marriage for another. Marriage as it has been designed for heterosexual couples remains the same but is now being opened to same-sex couples." - AFP

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PEOPLE hold a banner during a protest organised by fundamentalist Christians group Civitas Institute against the same-sex marriage in Paris. PHOTO: AFP