



**November 18, 2009**

**The New York City Anti-Violence Project is Outraged by the Brutal Murder of Jorge Steven López Mercado; Joins in Vigil and Call for Action**

**A statement from Sharon Stapel, Executive Director, New York City Anti-Violence Project**

The New York City Anti-Violence Project stands in solidarity with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Puerto Rican community members and anti-violence organizations, such as the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, in expressing our outrage and sadness about the brutal murder of 19-year-old aspiring fashion artist Jorge Steven López Mercado on November 14, 2009. **The New York City Anti-Violence Project will participate in a vigil in memory of Jorge Steven López Mercado on Sunday, November 22, 2009, from 5- 8:30pm, to be held at Christopher Street Piers in Manhattan.**

Jorge, a resident of Caguas, Puerto Rico, was discovered on the side of a road in Cayey, Puerto Rico over this past weekend. He had been decapitated, dismembered, and partially burned. Juan Antonio Martinez Matos, 28, was arrested as a suspect on November 17, 2009 and has confessed to murdering Jorge. Matos has reportedly made a statement to law enforcement officials that he was cruising for women in the “red light” district of Caguas when he met Jorge. Jorge entered Matos’ car and went home with him. Matos has claimed that he thought Jorge was a woman and police in Puerto Rico state that Matos may use a “gay panic” defense, arguing temporary insanity.

This horrifying murder is the latest example of the pervasive hate violence that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and sex worker communities experience on a daily basis. Members of LGBTQ and sex work communities are often targeted based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. AVP knows that transgender and gender non-conforming people and people engaged in sex work are especially vulnerable to bias-motivated violence and that many of these incidents go unreported due to the social and state-sanctioned stigma around identity and sex work. Hate violence not only affects the individual and their loved ones, but also sends a message of fear to the entire LGBTQ communities.

Though the Puerto Rican government added sexual orientation to its hate crimes laws in 2002, this particular protected category has never been enforced around anti-LGBTQ violence. The New York City Anti-Violence Project is deeply troubled by reports that a police investigator in Puerto Rico made public transphobic and homophobic statements about the case. With the recent enactment of the federal Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Law and with statements from law enforcement officials in Puerto Rico that this incident will be prosecuted as a hate crime, we are hopeful that the investigation of Jorge's murder will be pursued in accordance with federal and local hate crime provisions. We remain concerned by the limitations of existing hate crimes legislation to prevent hate violence and continue to advocate for the expansion of broad-based support and funding for LGBT-specific anti-violence education and prevention initiatives throughout the country so that murders such as Jorge never occur again.

AVP knows that hate violence incidents such as this can affect any one of us—even if we are not the direct victims. We encourage anyone who has experienced or been affected by an assault or threats of violence to contact our 24-hour bilingual (English/Spanish) hotline at 212-714-1141 and speak with a trained counselor if you are seeking support. All services are free and confidential. More information about The New York City Anti-Violence Project can be found at [www.avp.org](http://www.avp.org) and [www.facebook.com/antiviolence](http://www.facebook.com/antiviolence).

For additional safety tips, please visit our website, [www.avp.org](http://www.avp.org). Please forward this e-mail to your friends and urge them to stay safe.

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*The New York City Anti-Violence Project is dedicated to eliminating hate violence, sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities through counseling, advocacy, organizing, and public education.*