

Twenty-eight year old Vitalina Koval stepped out on International Women's Day 2018 to attend a peaceful protest. But she was met with violence, and came home with chemical burns to her eyes.

Vitalina Koval has been central to the LGBTI community in Ukraine. She helped set up a community centre - a safe space for LGBTI people within the growing hostility of the country.

In March 2017, Vitalina took part in the International Women's Day March in Ukraine. She was attacked by a dozen young men, who charged at her and other protesters – tearing up their posters and shouting threats. Shaken up, Vitalina went to the police and filed a complaint. The police never got back to her.

Determined not to let this stop her activism, Vitalina wanted to attend the 2018 Women's March. But she was worried – what if she was attacked again? She went to the police in advance this time, and they assured her the protesters would be well protected.

But just as the march was coming to an end, two men and four women from far-right group, 'Karpatska Sich' threw red paint all over Vitalina. Her eyes began to burn immediately.

I felt pain, shock and fear: "I could go blind!" People tried to provide the first aid immediately. They gave me tissues, and water to wipe the paint. It didn't help. These long minutes it hurt and I couldn't get the thought that I could lose my sight out of my head.

On arrival at hospital, doctors confirmed that Vitalina had chemical burns, but luckily her eyesight was intact. Still covered in paint, Vitalina headed straight to the police station. When she arrived, her attackers were sat by reception after being detained. The police officer made Koval state her home address – loudly - within earshot of her attackers. She felt scared and unsafe.

Since the march, Vitalina's friends have received threatening messages and even been followed home. Vitalina decided to organize an 'anti-violence' protest, but most of her fellow activists decided not to go, for fear of their safety.

Vitalina is a determined activist – but she is at risk and needs your support.

"I felt upset and sad that our system works like this. The police have no sense of justice." Vitalina Koval