

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA
May 17, 2008

A Commitment to Action Against Homophobia



“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

This simple, yet powerful, statement is enshrined in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, promulgated 60 years ago this year by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Yet the fundamental right of all human beings to equality and dignity is routinely denied to members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. Of the 192 member states of the United Nations, 85 have laws that criminalize homosexual conduct, which in some instances is punishable by death.

Violence, rape, harassment, abuse, beating, and even murder, on the basis of sexual orientation or identity, occur around the world with shocking regularity and impunity. Family and friends often ostracize and cast out people, including women and children, who do not conform to social and cultural norms of gender or sexuality, leading to devastating economic disempowerment as well as isolation. Members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations are often arrested without cause, imprisoned, and subjected to sexual abuse and/or mandatory HIV testing and anal or vaginal examinations. Discrimination is frequently institutionalized or state sanctioned, whereby law enforcement officials perpetrate human rights violations with impunity or react with indifference to violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Attempts to overcome such discrimination, such as gay pride activities or advocacy are opposed or prohibited.

The negative impact that homophobia has on effective responses to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections is well established. Even in countries without legal prohibitions against same-sex sexual behavior, widespread stigma often prevents men who have sex with men from seeking or receiving essential HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services. In many cases—particularly in countries where political or social leaders deny the existence of same sex sexuality or criminalize it—these services are absent altogether. Women who deploy their sexualities in ways outside heterosexual social norms may face double burdens of stigma and invisibility. In addition, insufficient research has been conducted on the health care needs of lesbian and bisexual women. Without information, education, support or access to health services, many people unknowingly engage in behaviors, or are placed in situations, that increase their risk of HIV infection and/or unwittingly pass on the virus.

As a result, HIV infection rates remain disproportionately high among men who have sex with men in both developed and developing countries. To reduce HIV incidence among men who have sex with men, it is essential to confront, condemn, and eradicate the homophobia that is the single biggest obstacle to effective HIV prevention, treatment, and care.

It was over eighteen years ago that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of diseases. The anniversary of that belated act, May 17, is now commemorated as the International Day Against Homophobia. On this day, we, the undersigned, declare zero tolerance for homophobia. We condemn the deafening silence with which nations greet the violence, persecution, discrimination and denial that are perpetrated on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people—a silence that condones the continued violation of the fundamental human rights of these people.

We therefore commit ourselves to the following actions:

1. Stand up for the human rights and dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) populations.

We commit to undertake, incorporate, and expand the following actions and activities:

- 1.1 Call for the end of impunity for those who violate the right of members of LGBT populations;
- 1.2 Educate and share information with LGBT communities about their human rights and about effective methods of documenting and advocating against violations of their rights;
- 1.3 Promote the human rights of all people affected by HIV/AIDS in collaboration with LGBT organizations and other human rights organizations;
- 1.4 Promote access to justice for individuals whose rights have been violated, including access to legal assistance;
- 1.5 Educate Parliamentarians, the Judiciary, and Ministries of Justice personnel, including police, about their obligations to respect and protect the human rights of all citizens;
- 1.6 Promote the dissemination and application of the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights and the Yogyakarta Principles, a document that affirms binding international legal standards for the protection of human rights in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity.

2. Speak out against homophobia and advocate equal rights for LGBT populations.

We commit to undertake, incorporate, and/or expand the following actions and activities:

- 2.1 Advocate policies and programs to fight homophobia at all levels of society, including in the workplace, in educational and healthcare systems, sports and recreation, correctional facilities, and the military and uniformed services;
- 2.2 Communicate with mass media about the pervasive effects of homophobia, its link to the spread of HIV infection, and the need to fight it at all levels.
- 2.3 Find and support champions against homophobia and collect examples of successful campaigns against homophobia.

3. Continue to assert the connection between human rights violations and the spread of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.

We commit to undertake, incorporate, and/or expand the following actions and activities:

- 3.1 Promote the dissemination and application of relevant provisions of the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS;
- 3.2 Promote continuing research into effective programs that link human rights protection and empowerment with effective community responses to HIV;
- 3.3 Promote the continuing development of means by which to measure and monitor these populations and their health and human rights needs.

amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Watch