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Image: Ludovic Bertron

Conference report

**Promoting the human rights of LGBT persons: next steps for international institutions and civil society**

Monday 1 – Wednesday 3 September 2014 | WP1312

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## Conference report

# Promoting the human rights of LGBT persons: next steps for international institutions and civil society

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Concerted action is needed from a broad spectrum of international actors if the human rights situation for the many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons facing persecution due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is to improve. Sharing the lessons learned of successes and setbacks to overcome obstacles and maximise on opportunities to move forward is particularly urgent in terms of contesting criminalisation and bringing to an end violent discrimination. This meeting sought to identify future leadership and ways in which the human rights situation for LGBT persons can be best supported by all actors in the international system. Bringing together the relevant stakeholders from international and regional institutions, policy makers, legislators, civil society and academia, the meeting aimed to:

- Consider different perspectives on LGBT equality to identify how best to approach national legislators and promote tolerance.
- Draw out different perspectives to identify the challenges and potential areas for progress in promoting the human rights of LGBT persons.
- Share lessons learned and best practice measures amongst representative civil society groups to increase capacity to provide protection from harm.
- Strengthen international focus and collaboration on the issue of promoting the human rights of LGBT persons.

### Key points

- The recognition that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons experience discrimination in different ways is crucial to ensuring that the needs of each community are respected equally. A nuanced approach that appreciates these distinctions but which aims at an overall improvement of the rights enjoyed by the whole community can build on the many opportunities presented by diversity.
- It is important to remember that there is interplay between the lived experience of LGBTI persons and the formal legal or policy contexts in which they exist. However, recognised legal status is indispensable as a symbol of belonging and in ensuring full citizenship. Repealing criminalisation laws is a necessary step towards equality, as well as advancing initiatives that ensure the full implementation of positive laws designed to provide protection from harm.
- There is a tension as to whether to prioritise formal legal or policy changes or capacity development for groups providing protection for LGBTI persons from persecution. Litigation, diplomacy and civil society activism all have a role to

“Human rights are LGBTI rights; LGBTI rights are human rights.”

“Groups on the ground are the experts.”

“Ask us what we need and we’ll tell you.”

play, but each effort must aim to be relevant to the particular context.

- Educating publics and officials is vital to increase understanding and ensure that narratives about perceived values do not detract from the essential requirement of equally applied internationally agreed human rights standards.
- Alliance building and strong coalitions are key: particularly with related efforts to promote human rights and development projects. These may include gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, and social and economic inclusion. The media and social champions of the human rights of LGBTI persons serve to amplify the message of tolerance, and there is much to be gained from identifying unusual voices which can change attitudes in new ways.
- Generating evidence on trends will pressure governments to take the issues of LGBTI persons seriously. Comprehensive collation and communication of this information on an international scale would provide a stronger global case as well as underpinning efforts at the national level.
- Human rights defenders benefit from being able to ‘speak the language’ of the people whose hearts and minds they are seeking to influence. For example, governments may be more receptive to proof of the economic improvements that a legal recognition of LGBTI persons provides to the whole of society. Every opportunity to effect change in this way will serve to strengthen the position of minorities.
- Governments, regional bodies and international institutions should increase efforts to communicate with each other and within their organisations to help ensure that LGBTI issues are considered throughout their work. Effective consultation with the LGBTI community will also clarify the alignment of priorities.
- There is an inherent difficulty in trying to generate consensus across and within the different sectors and levels of the international system. Whilst acknowledging the need for a diversity of approaches, there is room to coordinate a clearer message on the shared aims of all those working to promote human rights.
- Coordinated action at the international level remains important to build on the gains already made and to move the issue forward. Whilst continuing to push for a second sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) resolution is considered to be essential, using the full range of options currently available through the UN system provides many other opportunities.
- There is an opportunity to take advantage of the current level of international attention on this issue, whilst creating clear and sustainable strategies for the longer term. Communication is crucial to capitalise fully on each success and share the lessons learned from setbacks.

## The need for legal reform

“The history of the movement [for equality] can be charted through various legal actions.”

1. The law can be a paradox for those struggling to promote the human rights of LGBTI persons: it can be a source of repression but also a tool of liberation, in many cases the only tool available. It can be a symbol of belonging or of criminalisation, and this legality has profound practical implications. Bringing national laws in line with the obligations of agreed international human rights standards remains a key issue in promoting equality.
2. Even if discriminatory laws are seldom or never enforced they still have a profound impact on the lives of individuals. A legal underpinning for prejudice contributes to a wider climate of discrimination, encouraging a sense of impunity for acts of violence or blackmail, as well as having detrimental psychological effects on those they isolate.
3. As well as providing for a level of protection from harm, recognition as a legal citizen is essential for access to the full opportunities of society, such as secure ownership of property, healthcare and the ability to earn a living. It also empowers the individual with

“A legal underpinning for prejudice contributes to a wider climate of discrimination.”

an equal basis from which to further gain the respect of fellow citizens.

4. It is significant that the human rights of LGBTI persons are defined and defended in the decisions of international and regional courts, for example in the landmark case of *Toonen vs Australia* and the recent resolution from the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights. Legal rulings help to change attitudes and many legislative changes have been initiated following successful legal challenges, for example future advances were made possible by Supreme Court rulings in Nepal, Mexico and South Africa.
5. Having laws which enshrine the equal rights of LGBTI persons, such as the landmark constitution of South Africa, is clearly important. But it is also important to ensure that they are implemented by local judges, police officers and school boards. The ability to enforce formal policy can be hindered by a variety of factors in practice, for example where the attitudes of law enforcement are unsympathetic to LGBTI victims of crime. There are initiatives which provide good examples of how to strengthen law enforcement processes, for example the rapid response team being developed in South Africa to address sexual violence. Well-defined and inclusive laws are also a requirement of full and proper protection, for example ensuring that rape is not defined as a gender-specific crime and that attacks targeted at LGBTI people are considered hate crimes.
6. Many barriers still exist to groups or individuals aiming to change the law or seek its protection. These include the high costs of litigation and limited access to lawyers who are willing to take on cases on behalf of criminalised persons.
7. The advancement of laws that protect the rights of LGBTI persons can also be problematic where they may be perceived as encroaching on other rights, such as freedom of religious belief. The tension between freedom of speech and the need to tackle hate speech is of current concern, and is further complicated where religious groups promote discrimination in more than one country.
8. The wording of legislation has a significant impact on rights. For example, the requirement to identify as male or female rather than legal recognition as transgender, intersex or non-identified on official documents. These requirements vary around the world; in some countries an individual may be required to undergo surgery, have hormonal treatment, or to claim that their identity has changed since birth for health reasons. Alternative discourses around gender are available when new laws are introduced and the repealing of old laws provides an opportunity to amend the terminology rather than reverting to previously used terms.
9. The decision as to whether to challenge criminalisation laws or to introduce anti-discrimination initiatives may depend on the context. In one country there may be significant symbolism in achieving decriminalisation, for instance in challenging the recent Supreme Court ruling in India. However, in other cases ongoing persecution may need to be addressed first, for example in Cameroon where the number of arrests and prosecutions are high. It should also be considered whether the pursuit of decriminalisation would inadvertently put activists on the ground at more risk.
10. Countries which have gone through a transition from criminalisation to decriminalisation have a moral obligation to show others how to overcome prejudice. For example, the United Kingdom can share its experience of repealing discriminatory laws (which were previously exported to many countries that retain them today), and of advancing new legislation enshrining positive rights, such as the Equality Act and same-sex marriage.
11. Citizens everywhere can help by engaging with their leaders to ensure that they fulfil their obligations to adhere to the principles of internationally agreed human rights law.
12. It is important to engage with legislators and legal bodies to challenge discriminatory laws and promote the protection of LGBTI persons from harm, but the challenge remains as to how?

“The rights of LGBTI people have become a lightning rod for very different conceptions of the world.”

## Challenging the politicisation of LGBTI

13. There is an historical trend regarding the introduction of discriminatory laws linked to other political purposes. This continues today, for example where laws ostensibly targeting the LGBTI community include sweeping language which restricts other freedoms, such as of assembly or expression, with implications for all of society.
14. Polarisation exists within and across countries around the issue of respecting the rights of LGBTI persons, with opposition movements which are often highly dedicated and well-resourced. There is also a difficulty in separating this issue of human rights from other narratives in international relations. For example, western countries can be challenged by a perception of neo-colonialism when projecting a positive message about respecting the human rights of LGBTI persons.
15. A particular challenge is around the current narrative attempting to contrast “traditional values” with “individual freedoms”, especially around the supposed incompatibility of certain identities with particular notions of the family or principles of faith. The implications of this goes beyond LGBTI minorities, who in some cases are targeted as a proxy for disputes about different conceptions of the world. It should be remembered that all LGBTI people were, or are, members of families and that many are deeply religious. It is important to ensure that the concept of “family” is not allowed to be defined as being exclusionary of LGBTI people, but rather encompasses all the diverse manifestations of “families”, eg single parents, surrogacy and adoption.
16. The political opportunism of scapegoating the LGBTI community as a means of distracting publics from other unpopular issues domestically or to project a certain image of a government internationally remains a significant issue. Reassuring people that the message is one of equal and not special rights may allay fears that the promotion of LGBTI equality is a threat to societies.
17. Categorizing states into “good” or “bad” is unhelpful. Instead there should be a focus on identifying existing opportunities. In every country and region there are people who are open to reflection and dialogue. No country or region has a perfect record and further improvements are possible everywhere, for example more can be done to ensure full equality for transgender and intersex persons in Europe and Latin America, where obtaining official documents that correspond to their identity can be difficult.
18. Parliaments are not always accessible to LGBTI persons but there have been notable successes in educating and communicating with policymakers, and instances whereby those who were initially less sympathetic have become valuable influencers. NGOs and activists can help by raising awareness and presenting information to officials to debunk myths and inform them of the real issues. It can be more effective to educate officials in a setting away from the public eye, especially in the early stages.
19. Engaging with policymakers can be highly dependent on personalities and it can be challenging to identify the sympathetic individuals amongst many officials. Effective consultation and engagement requires activists to know the best approach to take and with which people. Elections resulting in a swift change of political leadership require activists to rebuild relationships with new officials. Working wherever possible with politicians, whether in or out of government, as well as civil servants can help to sustain longer-term relationships.
20. Further advances could be made by increasing representation of LGBTI persons at the legislative level itself. Increasing the public profile of LGBTI individuals would help to overcome the problem of a lack of visibility and reaffirm to the rest of society that they are citizens capable of holding the responsibilities of office. It is empowering for LGBTI people to meet with other parliamentarians on an equal basis as colleagues.
21. Engagement with legislators can be further complicated by structural factors, for example the different jurisdictions of federal governments and the level of independence of courts from the legislature. Civil society organisations and

“Education is the key to the legislature.”

governments are also often working to very different timescales and this can impact on expectations.

22. The recognition of LGBTI issues by policymakers is crucial to ensure that related activities are included in, and supported by, government programmes and local budgets. Formal recognition from the government can be a crucial first step for activists as small and unregistered organisations often find it difficult to get off the ground. Although extremely challenging in some contexts, the ability to communicate effectively with policymakers remains vital.

### **Communicating the message of equality**

“It is about the freedom to define your life project.”

23. Education to dispel the myths both around LGBTI persons and the movement to ensure equal human rights is paramount. For example, it is important to ensure that the demand for the recognition of LGBTI equality is understood to equate to the full application of all existing human rights, such as freedom from violence and discrimination. This should be properly understood as a matter of tolerance, fair treatment and the ability to be a full citizen, including playing a part in decision-making processes where LGBTI people are often nowhere to be seen.
24. It is also important to challenge prejudices. For example, dismissing the notion that the sexual abuse of children is in any way related to sexual identity. Rather the focus should be on the impact of discrimination on the rights of children: LGBTI youth may be particularly vulnerable or lack the information to make a life choice.
25. Other social issues such as same-sex marriage can be addressed in the longer-term and it can be more productive to prioritise issues understood by the community. For example, activists have been able to work with faith leaders to promote human rights having assured the leaders that there is no agenda to undermine their religious beliefs.
26. Opportunities may vary globally and a nuanced approach is needed to take advantage of them. In some cultures it may be possible to engage people with transgender issues as a first step, whereas organisations elsewhere have raised lesbian and gay issues in the first instance before addressing bisexual and transgender issues at a later stage.
27. International approaches need to reflect this diversity. For example, it should be appreciated that Africa is a large continent and one solution will not necessarily transfer easily between countries. Any broad initiatives will also need the buy-in from the countries and regions where implementation is to take place in order to be recognised as politically legitimate.
28. By far the most important factor is to think and act locally. To ensure that the message is specific to the context it needs to be suitable for the locality and at the right time for the people concerned. The role of outside actors should be to engage with groups working on the ground, as they are likely to know what approach will work. A cautious approach is required and may sometimes involve being prepared to refrain from action where requested; this does not entail being completely silent, but instead finding other ways of creating alternative spaces and developing different strategies.
29. Although it can be difficult to gain recognition of LGBTI issues, the language used needs to be clear: it can cause confusion where the rights of LGBTI people are alluded to under vague phrasing on similar issues, eg “vulnerable groups”. The suspicion and mistrust which this can create may cause significant delays on LGBTI and other human rights issues until stakeholders are sure of what they are agreeing to.
30. There can also be unintended consequences from the language used to promote understanding. For example, the use of the term “men who have sex with men” (MSM) can lead to lesbian and gender identity concerns being overlooked where ministries of health focus their harm reduction strategies exclusively on the provision of condoms.
31. The messaging can be tailored to the audience. In some cases it can be more effective to promote the moral case but in other instances the business argument may be more

persuasive. For example, highlighting the negative economic implications of restricting the right of LGBTI persons to work. Similarly, there will be high costs resulting from the exclusion of LGBTI people from mainstream healthcare systems. Developing a strong base of evidence to support these arguments is a powerful tool.

32. Setting out consistent and realistic commitments and ensuring coordinated messaging across and within institutions allows for the development of sustainable strategies.

### **Building alliances and working in collaboration**

33. Future success is highly dependent upon ensuring that the promotion of equality for LGBTI persons takes place within the wider context of human rights. This includes efforts to promote gender equality and the welfare of HIV/AIDS patients or people with disabilities. Addressing these issues as part of a wider framework has proved to be a productive way forward and there are many examples of countries where this is already happening. For example, in Uruguay the rights of women and LGBTI people have been promoted together with some success. It is important for LGBTI groups to be engaged with wider policy issues and to be seen to be supportive of related groups.
34. Support for programmes designed to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS remains one of the key crossover issues. The criminalising of LGBTI people reduces their ability to receive treatment and significantly increases the risks for all of society.
35. Broadening a base of support to include sympathetic voices in religious communities would do much to tackle opposition and provide an influential voice to which others may be more receptive. This could include key figures in the Catholic Church and Islamic faith leaders, as well as academic institutions, for example in Cairo and Tehran.
36. The media is a powerful tool to address the stereotyping of LGBTI people and celebrity engagement may be particularly influential. There are opportunities to work with supportive voices globally, for example promoting tolerance in Islamic communities and the global south in collaboration with Lebanese pop stars or Bollywood actors. Increasingly open discussion of LGBTI issues helps to overcome societal taboos.
37. Social media is an effective way to engage young people, and may be particularly important in societies where this is the largest demographic. Views on online forums can also provide an insight into activity and engagement at the local level.
38. International business can be very influential by highlighting the economic case to address discrimination and providing protection to their employees around the world, even if just to reassure LGBTI persons that they have the security of their job.
39. Engaging with diaspora communities can help to share experiences across countries, including students studying abroad and returning home from exchange programmes.
40. Parents and families groups are a strong source of support to LGBTI activists and this network can be extended between countries.
41. Universities can help to provide the research skills and data-basing capacity to build comprehensive evidence of human rights abuses.
42. There is potential to work with individual majors of “proud cities”, eg Mexico City, when the national or federal level does not prove as immediately accessible.
43. Civil society groups can work with other institutions to provide information and training, for example by running workshops with the police, media and trade unions, or providing curriculum advice to schools.
44. NGOs can support similar organisations overseas, providing the relevant advice and assistance to the stage those organisations are at.
45. Each individual success can be highlighted as an example of how to effect change, for instance maximising on the impact of the African Commission resolution. Lessons can also be learned from setbacks. For example, the opposition to the introduction of the

Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda highlighted the importance of community guidance, information-sharing with NGOs and partners, communication strategies and the use of social media. All of these best practise measures can be better recorded and shared.

## Coordination at the international and regional level

46. The effective promotion of international human rights requires an understanding of the most appropriate entry points. Consultation with LGBTI groups when devising an approach or intervention is important in that it helps to ensure initiatives are targeted and timely.
47. International institutions are often further removed from immediate concerns and civil society organisations can bring a practical awareness of the domestic political context. However, they should also understand the difficulties faced by institutions working at the transnational level and factor this into their own language and approach.

### United Nations

“UN system lives and dies on the implementation, fulfilment and support for LGBTI activists on the ground.”

48. The pace of change at the UN with regard to LGBTI rights is relatively fast; no other issue, which has been so contentious, has seen such rapid progress. Twenty years ago LGBTI issues would hardly have been mentioned; now there is a specific sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) resolution, the rights of LGBTI persons are explicitly addressed in communications from the highest levels of leadership - including Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and former High Commissioner Navi Pillay - and are considered in the work of UN treaty bodies, special procedures and agencies.
49. Although the UN system is limited by the need to achieve a broad consensus amongst the multitude of its member states, as an institution it engages directly with governments and provides a venue for valuable behind the scenes dialogue. The UN is also projecting a strong public position as part of a broad human rights message challenging stereotypes, eg the Free and Equal campaign.
50. In spite of this, more could be done to ensure that the work of the UN is more consistent and able to go further. In particular, the issues of LGBTI persons could be incorporated more rigorously across the work of the whole organisation, from headquarters to local offices. Attention should be given to these issues regardless of whether LGBTI advocates are involved in discussions themselves.
51. Civil society organisations have different expectations of the UN system. However, there is a consistent view that: the persecution of LGBTI persons is systematic and linked to other concerns, civil society groups need technical support from the UN, and that the UN provides a space to address the issue.
52. The UN remains the primary place to bring together international consensus, particularly at the Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The UNHRC has an institutional mandate to respond to the systematic and increasing violations of the human rights of LGBTI persons. There is a view that the efficacy of the UN as an international institution will be highlighted by its ability to respond to complex issues such as human rights for LGBTI persons. Disagreement will be inevitable but the strength of the process is reflected in the degree of engagement. Action is urgently needed in order to alleviate the very real suffering of people on the ground.
53. A second SOGI resolution is still seen as an essential part of that effort – both to provide a stronger international framework and to allow the stakeholders involved to move their attention onto other efforts. A second resolution will require states to bring the issue forward and provide effective leadership. It will also need the broad support of all regions in order to be passed and implemented. The leadership of South Africa in delivering the first resolution is widely respected as crucial to its success, but it should also be remembered that future efforts will need to be a joint process with shared responsibility. The prospect of a second resolution depends upon a broad consensus and a focus on violent discrimination continues to be the area where there is most

“A second resolution would enable the United Nations to do what it’s supposed to do.”



agreement.

54. The first SOGI resolution was a landmark achievement in that it recognised what was needed was the application of existing human rights principles to all human beings, rather than the introduction of new or special rights for LGBTI persons. The challenge remains as to how to apply these human rights comprehensively.

#### Regional bodies and aid agencies

55. In spite of disagreement on the potential for success at the regional level there have been significant achievements through some of the regional bodies. For example, in the work of the Inter-American Commission and the recent resolution by the African Commission. Regional bodies have an interpretive mandate regarding rights and their review of states reports and special mechanisms can be influential. Policymakers and members of the legal profession may find the regional environment more conducive for discussion, away from their specific country contexts.
56. Development agencies face many challenges in the promotion of the human rights of LGBTI people. For example, there is a tension around their relationship with governments that maintain discriminatory laws but whose citizens face social and economic problems. It can also be difficult to know how far civil society groups are representative of the communities they are aiming to assist. The role of development agencies is also shaped by the priorities of their governments and domestic populations. Whilst development agencies aim to be steered by local priorities, NGOs will sometimes run programmes on the basis that they accord with donor criteria. Effective two-way communication is required to align the priorities of development agency and activists.
57. Although development agencies have a limited ability to project public awareness in other countries, they can work with NGOs and help to build alliances and networks. As well as taking direction from local groups, development agencies are able to provide leadership expertise and innovative advice. Development agencies can influence governments and ensure that implementation is appropriate and useful.
58. Development agencies, such as HIVOS and DfID, have a degree of leverage with the resources they provide. The focus should be on encouragement and support of local efforts. The use of positive language by donors is important, for example referring to “responsible use of aid resources” rather than “aid conditionality”. This reflects the moral responsibility to ensure the appropriate use of aid money.

#### Current opportunities

59. In addition to the possibility of a second SOGI resolution, there are many opportunities within the UN system. This includes the Universal Periodical Review, as well as other treaty bodies such as the Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
60. The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will focus on a rights-based approach to development. These will be influential in setting the framework for the future. The “equity” pillar offers a strong line of approach, with focus on social inclusion as well as health and rights. LGBTI groups have lobbied for the inclusion of their priorities in this process with limited success. However, there will be opportunities in the next few months during the final drafting stages.
61. The Commonwealth provides a significant platform to advance debate. The majority of countries which maintain criminalisation laws are Commonwealth members and there is scope to engage governments indirectly through this body.

#### Role of diplomacy

62. Strong commitment from foreign affairs departments is important. For example, the UK has taken a firm public position with regard to the defence of LGBTI people as a matter of human rights. The US State Department has built on the position set out in the

“What we are asking for is investment in human rights systems.”

Presidential Memorandum of 2011, defining objectives including the combatting of criminalisation, protection of asylum seekers, and swift response mechanisms. These public positions can be strengthened by consistent internal messages about tolerance and equality and good practice measures, such as awarding federal contracts to institutions that display a commitment to tackling discrimination. Tailored approaches are highly effective, for example region-specific toolkits and dedicated resources to support projects on the ground, such as the Global Equality Fund.

63. Diplomatic missions and embassies can be valuable in convening and facilitating communication between activists and policymakers, as well providing safe spaces for interaction.
64. Cooperation between governments is necessary in order to maintain the momentum, for example in encouraging the UN to take a systematic approach. Governments can also assist by identifying supportive individuals or agencies and the appropriate arguments to use when approaching them. In addition to support for civil society efforts, governments can also call on the knowledge of human rights experts. By promoting an exchange of ideas and experience governments could contribute to a compendium of best practise.

### **Ongoing challenges for activists**

“Homophobia is not an opinion. It is a crime against sexual difference.”

65. The personal risk of harm to advocates and activists on the ground is a grave concern and the issue of security remains crucial. Increased visibility and public profile often heightens the risk and it is important to have a strategy in place to deal with any potential backlash. Outside actors who support initiatives share this responsibility. Persecution which drives activists and advocates out of a country reduces the capacity for local movements to promote human rights. Future legal strategies need to include mechanisms and tactics to assist activists who are imprisoned or who continue to face the threat of violence.
66. Governments and law enforcement agencies can directly hinder activist groups through raids on offices, the detention of employees, and the confiscation of information from computers. Coupled with the constant threat of legislation criminalising LGBTI persons, this can keep civil society groups constantly in reaction mode.
67. When only a few organisations are visible it places enormous pressures on them, in terms of accountability as well as financial and organisational capacity. It can also be challenging to have the necessary time to reflect inwards on what changes are needed. The ability to move forward in a planned manner is essential, but this can be hindered by the challenge of sustaining a workforce of volunteers or retaining talented management who receive job offers elsewhere.
68. NGOs need good organisational structures, including strong management and the ability to make the most of limited resources. Having a good balance of responsibility between secretariat and membership and having dedicated points of contact between donor agencies, diplomatic missions and activist groups was also considered helpful.
69. The capacity to document abuses comprehensively is essential to strengthening the case for the urgency of protecting LGBTI persons from discrimination. Civil society groups need to be able to access support to collect and publish this evidence.

### **Conclusion**

- It is widely recognised that the current international climate presents both a time of great danger and of opportunity. The human rights situation for many LGBTI persons around the world continues to be in urgent need of improvement, and in some cases is getting worse. However, there is currently significant international attention focused on the issue and some important steps forward have been made.
- The right of LGBTI people to freedom from discrimination has been defined in

international law as being the equal application of human rights and there are clear examples of regional and national legislation enshrining this protection.

- Strong messaging is forthcoming from the highest levels of the United Nations and supportive governments. Consideration of the treatment of LGBTI persons is included in the work of international bodies and national governments which monitor human rights standards and engage in development projects. However, more can be done to ensure the uniformity and effectiveness of these efforts.
- Further cooperation is required at the international level to develop a strong evidence base regarding the urgency of the situation and to ensure governments are held to account.
- Broad alliances across a whole range of human rights actors are essential to achieve further lasting change. Central to this is the necessity to increase and enhance communication between and within organisations.
- Change is most effective when it is informed by the perspective of people defending their rights in local communities; ensuring that these voices are heard at every level of the international system is vital to future success.
- There are many lessons to share from the diversity of experiences of LGBTI activists around the world. All countries need to work through this issue in their own way but there are opportunities for others to hasten and encourage.
- Preventing a further deterioration would be a success in itself and the recent experiences of many countries show that a previously unimaginable change for the better is possible.

**Julius Veasey**

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