



ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

Friday, 17 May 2019

Statement by the Advisory Council on Youth on IDAHOT

Justice and Protection for ALL

For 15 years, 17 May has been celebrated as the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT). This means that young people today have grown up in a world where an increasing part of the international community has celebrated diversity and worked for progress in the protection of the rights of all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, expression or sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

It has been nine years this IDAHOT since the Council of Europe adopted the first international instrument recommending member states adopt specific measures to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The Council of Europe's standards and mechanisms to promote and ensure respect for the human rights of every individual, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons (LGBT), have since been developed, with the Parliamentary Assembly making further recommendations focusing on the rights of transgender persons, intersex persons and rainbow families. The Council of Europe has a longstanding commitment to ending homophobia and transphobia in its member states working on the foundations of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The theme of IDAHOT 2019 is **Justice and Protection for All**. While there has been progress towards the equal enjoyment of human rights for LGBTI people in recent decades, IDAHOT is also a day to take stock and call for continued efforts to address and counter the increasing challenges to equal rights and non-discrimination.

These challenges are found both in the public sector, such as in education, and in the shrinking space for civil society. These issues are connected in the same way that society itself is connected: where the protection of LGBTI minorities by human rights defenders is not ensured and civil society has no space to mobilise, different parts of the population will continue to have their rights violated. And when education is not inclusive and does not reflect the diversity of society, stigmas and stereotypes are reified and reproduced. Discrimination does not occur in a vacuum and efforts to change attitudes, regulation and practice to counter it must be mainstreamed throughout all sectors of society.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND SHRINKING CIVIL SOCIETY

In the recent consultative meeting on shrinking space for civil society the Advisory Council on Youth expressed concerns over the increased problems human rights organisations and human rights defenders are facing, including those working with LGBTI and women's rights. In this vein, within the Council of Europe, the Human Rights Commissioner, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of INGOs have expressed concerns over the backslide of democratic participation for civil society, as have the European Union and the United Nations.

Examples of such shortfalls in protection include the harassment of LGBTI advocates, vandalising of offices, the adoption of laws restricting freedom of speech, assembly and association, local authorities denying or revoking permits to demonstrations with an LGBTI theme without legitimate cause, as well as the implementation of “foreign agent laws” in many countries which restrict foreign donations to such human rights NGOs.¹

“Within the LGBTI movement we have definitely seen an increased level of hate crimes and I think it has to do with increased visibility of LGBTQI people. We have seen this across Europe too and it’s often the case that when rights progress there is a backlash. For example, in several cases local Pride celebrations have been attacked especially by right-wing extremists.” Frank Berglund, President of RFSL Ungdom (Swedish LGBTQI Youth Federation).²

The Advisory Council on Youth and the wider youth sector around Europe are working daily to promote peace, social cohesion, inclusion and combating discrimination. Following the adoption of the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on young people’s access to rights, the Joint Council on Youth has adopted guidelines to its implementation.

The Advisory Council on Youth calls on policymakers, national, regional and local authorities to speak up for and ensure justice and protection for all. This includes adopting measures to counter discrimination and ensure the human rights and equal opportunities for all young people in all spheres of society.

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the Advisory Council on Youth and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its member states.

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/the-long-march-against-homophobia-and-transphobia>.

² Frank Berglund, President of RFSL Ungdom (The Swedish LGBTQI youth federation, 7 September 2018).