



IDAHO Forum 2016

Building Bridges and Alliances

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Your Royal Highness Crown Princess of Denmark,
excellences,
ladies and gentlemen,
colleagues...

The theme of this year's IDAHO Forum could not be more topical. At a time when discrimination and intolerance in Europe is on the rise, we need to do our utmost to build bridges and alliances between civil society, governments, religious and faith-based communities as well as the private sector.

Our task is compelling. Without smart policies to foster equality and to promote mutual understanding and respect, parallel societies emerge: people living alongside one another, rather than living together. That is why we need to be determined in our efforts to build inclusive societies – inclusive of LGBTI people, inclusive of us all.

I know I speak to many “converted” colleagues here, but let’s remind ourselves, to counter any doubts; LGBTI people do not ask for special or additional rights.

They simply require respect for their human rights and dignity, just like anyone else. This includes the principles of equality and non-discrimination in accessing these rights, as provided by the European Convention on Human Rights.

Neither cultural, traditional nor religious values, nor the rules of a so-called “dominant culture” can ever justify discrimination or violent crimes against LGBTI people.

Still, LGBTI people’s access to their human rights is frequently hindered by discriminatory treatment, stereotyping and intolerant attitudes.

In some Council of Europe Member States, homophobic and transphobic attitudes are used to legitimise legislation that limits open, free and factual public discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity and prevents people – notably young people – from gaining access to unbiased information. These laws are wrong and out of date.

In other Council of Europe Member States, too many LGBTI people suffer discrimination at school or work and therefore hide their sexual orientation or gender identity from their school mates or colleagues.

According to the EU-wide study commissioned by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, one in three LGBT young people have experienced negative comments about their sexual orientation or gender identity at

school. Almost half of transgender women experience discrimination when looking for a job. And, one in five LGBT people encounter discrimination at work. These are personal tragedies for the individuals concerned, but also a senseless waste of human potential.

Across Europe, we also find widespread weaknesses in the rules and practices put in place to protect LGBTI people from bias-motivated crimes.

It is clearly an advance that half the Council of Europe Member States – 25 countries – have specific criminal legislation in place punishing offences motivated by hatred on account of the victim's sexual orientation. And yet, a worrying number of authorities are failing to properly implement these laws.

Furthermore, only one in three – 13 – Council of Europe Member States have explicitly included gender identity as an aggravating circumstance in their hate crime legislation.

In addition, LGBTI people belonging to national, ethnic or religious minorities face multiple layers of discrimination. Being a "minority within minority" often means that there is very little room – or no room at all – to be who you really are.

We are all familiar with these problems. But what would the fair and inclusive society that we want to see look like?

First, we have to acknowledge that our societies do not consist only of different groups of people, but also that there is diversity within each and every group. LGBTI people may be Muslim, Christian, atheists. They

are people with different abilities. They are migrants, asylum seekers or holders of European passports. They are women, men, non-binary; and they have different ethnic backgrounds.

As a result, LGBTI people are affected by different axes of inequality – not only by those arising from homophobia and transphobia, but also by those that are rooted in racism and sexism. This is why we have to pay attention to multiple discrimination. That is why we have to put in place effective measures to solve it. And that is why we must mainstream this understanding across all our work.

Second, in our mission to build more inclusive societies, few fields of activity are as important as that of human rights education, including education that unpacks stereotypical gender roles and fosters gender equality – as required by the Council of Europe’s “Istanbul Convention” on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

When we talk about education we need to remember that the aim is not to teach young people what to think, but rather *how* to think critically enough, in order to live together with others in diverse societies. And it is not only young people who need to learn to respect other ways of life; we also need to learn and to lead by example.

Third, we must do our utmost to combat the growth in racism, intolerance, discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. In our efforts to do so, I encourage you all to take into consideration the evidence-based recommendations made by the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (known as ECRI) which, since 2013, has been

monitoring the developments in the human rights situation of LGBTI people. This is in line with the established case-law of the European Court of Human Rights which stresses that treating violence and brutality arising from discriminatory attitudes as ordinary violence means turning a blind eye to discrimination.

Fourth, when we're developing our policies and legislation, we shouldn't shy away from addressing politically sensitive issues such as: access to family rights, heavily medicalised legal gender recognition processes, the treatment of intersex children, and, the treatment of LGBTI prisoners or asylum seekers.

Fifth, and last, governments cannot build inclusive societies alone. I think it is important to acknowledge that, had it not been for the tireless work of many generations of LGBTI activists from different parts of Europe, we would not be discussing these issues here in Copenhagen today.

Building inclusive societies is a shared endeavour which must involve all levels of government, local and regional authorities, national human rights bodies, civil society, religious and faith-based institutions, media, arts and sports organisations as well as the private sector. Indeed, this understanding is embedded in the programme of this year's IDAHO forum.

Now, to conclude...

We have achieved a great deal regarding LGBTI people. Today, more than half the Council of Europe Member States guarantee marriage

equality or registered partnership for same-sex couples, also thanks to a number of recent judgments by the European Court of Human Rights. More and more Member States are redrafting their legislation to guarantee the right to respect for private life for transgender people. Anti-discrimination and hate crime legislation increasingly covers sexual orientation and gender identity. Police officers, prosecutors, teachers and doctors across Europe are more aware of gender and sexual diversity than they have ever been before.

We should feel encouraged by the fact that social attitudes towards LGBTI people have changed faster than on any other issue.

But much remains to be done. Building inclusive societies is a difficult task and progress does not come easily or quickly. And, of course, it is important to remember that inclusion is not just about LGBTI people – or any other group for that matter – inclusion is about everyone.

Let me end with these words.

Our achievements so far should empower us to strive for greater equality, to strive for a fairer society, and to strive for a society that includes us all.

Thank you.