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**Attacks against the human rights of LGBTI people are assaults on the rule of law.  
It is time to push back.**

**12<sup>th</sup> European IDAHOT+ Forum**

**Speech by Michael O'Flaherty**  
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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Prime Minister, Parliamentary Secretary, excellencies, dear friends.

Today, there is widespread appreciation of the essential importance of protecting and preserving the rule of law state; of ensuring that our societies are ruled in full conformity with law that *itself* respects and upholds international human rights.

There are some key bellwethers by which to test the status of the rule of law. Among those is the extent to which the state respects and honours the human rights, the dignity, of its LGBTI communities.

On this test, I consider that the rule of law is in a very poor state, or in decline, in far too many places here in Europe, and beyond. This is also illustrated by key analyses, like the 2025 Rainbow Map and Index.

I refer to laws that discriminate against LGBTI people, that forbid them to assemble, to march, to protest, or to even discuss their existence. To laws that forbid any formal recognition of relationships. To laws and practices that foster hate and violence against LGBTI people, by dehumanising and pitting them against others.

I think also of the perverse backlash against gender identity, in a manner that is both in violation of international law, and in defiance of human realities.

And, as you well know, these are just some of the manifestations of the current LGBTI-related assaults on the rule of law.

What brought us to this situation? I'm not competent to respond comprehensively to that question, but it is not difficult for me to discern some of the features of the trajectory.

For instance, it is not difficult to observe the link between repressive measures and the quest to attain or retain political power; to employ populist tools that draw on disinformation and misinformation, and that scapegoat marginalised groups.

We hear lies about not only our contemporary world, but also about our histories and our cultures. And all of this is exacerbated when otherwise law-abiding leaders stay silent, or compromise in the interests of deal-making or coalition-building.

But enough of the description and analysis. It is time to push back, to fix our societies so that they equally honour the human rights of everyone. In that regard, I make a number of recommendations, and I am directing them to political leaders and governments.

First, clearly, anti-LGBTI laws and policies should be immediately repealed, and rejected where they are proposed.

Second, I ask our leaders to have the courage to call out LGBTI-directed hate whenever they encounter it. To name it, and all its associated actions and initiatives, as contrary to human rights obligations. I ask them never to forget that when they turn a blind eye, they do so at the expense of real people's lives.

Third, I call on governments to put or keep the human rights of LGBTI people at the heart of their bilateral foreign policy, ensuring its presence in every aspect of engagement with other states.

Fourth, I cannot overstate the importance of multilateral engagement on the issues. The IDAHOT+ Forum is one important example of this, and I express appreciation to our host, Malta. More broadly, I am proud of the work of my own organisation, the Council of Europe. I am encouraged that 30 of its member states issued a joint statement for IDAHOT+ in recent days. But I am disappointed that 16 of the member states found it more difficult to affirm their commitment this year.

Finally, in these dangerous times, I urge states to do more to protect at-risk members of LGBTI communities. For instance, there is great scope to expand humanitarian visa schemes, to provide respite visas, and to ensure other safe and regular pathways to Europe for LGBTI people and human rights defenders. States also need to be very consequent in ensuring that reforms to migration law and practice do not expose LGBTI people to danger, including the risk of refoulement.

To conclude, allow me, in the words of the IDAHOT+ joint statement, to reiterate my "firm and unwavering commitment to the protection of human rights and dignity for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics".

Friends, our shared challenge is to get respect for the most basic of human rights and thus to ensure the integrity of our rule of law states. Our communities deserve no less.