



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the International Day Against Homophobia or Transphobia

As delivered Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 16, 2013

Tomorrow, May 17, is the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, or "IDAHO." The date of May 17 was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. In honor of this day, we celebrate the diversity and efforts of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community and individuals around the world. IDAHO is a true grassroots campaign and we commend NGOs that are organizing special events in over 100 countries globally, including almost all OSCE countries.

In the United States, many NGOs, often youth led, will focus their May 17 efforts on combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools and universities, and among societies at large. In recent years, numerous tragic incidents have prompted greater awareness both in the United States and in other OSCE countries about the potential severity of bullying and its devastating impact. As part of a national initiative to prevent bullying, President Obama and other public figures continue to share a message of hope with LGBT youth through the 'It Gets Better' campaign. Certainly, we can all agree that children should feel safe when they're in school. Yet bullying remains a problem in all of our societies, and one which the OSCE should consider as we work on our tolerance initiatives. For that reason, the United States welcomes the relevant opportunity of the Ukrainian Chairmanship's focus on tolerance and youth and remains committed to combatting "all forms of" intolerance and discrimination in our work at the OSCE.

We commend participating States that have enshrined the protection of the human rights of LGBT persons in their policies and legislation. The United States wishes to highlight that Albania, host of our upcoming High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, approved two amendments in their parliament on May 4 that further protect members of minority groups, especially those in the LGBT community. The first amendment adds sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of classes specifically protected by Albania's hate crime bill. Following Prime Minister Sali Berisha's meeting with LGBT groups, he committed his support for the adoption of the amendments. We urge other participating States to similarly update their hate crimes and discrimination laws specifically to include discrimination against LGBT individuals.

Yet we remain disappointed that numerous OSCE participating States continue to silence the voices of LGBT persons and their allies. We reject the disturbing practice of legislation that infringes the human rights and fundamental freedoms of any person, including LGBT individuals, such as the freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and belief under the guise of banning "gay propaganda."

People continue to be killed, arrested, and harassed in the OSCE area because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. With the persistence of hate crimes and other forms of prejudice, we urge participating States to implement all of their OSCE commitments and specifically Ministerial Decision No. 9/09 on Combating Hate Crimes.

The urgent need to implement these commitments is illustrated by a horrific hate crime reportedly committed on May 9th against Vladislav Tornovoi, a 23-year old gay man in Volgograd, Russia. According to press reports, police have arrested two men in the case, one of whom has admitted to sodomizing, beating, and burning the victim, and eventually crushing his skull with a rock. Investigators in the case have confirmed that the motive appeared to be homophobia. Anti-LGBT initiatives, like homosexual “propaganda” laws and bans on LGBT assembly, suggest that homophobia is officially sanctioned, and may encourage those who would act violently on such prejudice.

The United States recognizes the broader responsibility we share to promote human rights for all people, especially those who are marginalized, and we take this opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the fight against discrimination and intolerance in all their forms. As President Obama said, “The struggle to end discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons is a global challenge, and one that is central to the United States’ commitment to promoting human rights.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.