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Working Session 3: Freedom of assembly and association (September 27, 2011)

A Joint Statement by Human Rights First, The Council for Global Equality, COC Nederland, and International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe)

We call on governments to abide by commitments to respect the fundamental freedoms of assembly and association and to take adequate measures to ensure security and protection for all in their exercise of these rights. Guaranteeing the right to freedom of assembly and association must be a priority for all participating States of the OSCE. However, many States have failed to fully ensure these fundamental freedoms, and a number of governments actively suppress them.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals have been particularly affected by this suppression of rights and continue the uphill struggle for the right to freedom of assembly and association. LGBTI pride parades offer an opportunity for many individuals to exercise the right to freedom of assembly and expression. Historically, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex pride parades have come to symbolize the resistance to intolerance and bigotry that surround LGBTI people in their daily lives.

Commendably, some participating States have improved implementation of these fundamental commitments by taking steps to advance the freedom of association and assembly of LGBTI individuals, yet there are still ample examples where official restrictions and private violence remain particular concerns. Restricting such peaceful demonstrations is particularly damaging and unacceptable. Let me mention several specific examples of such violations in 2011:

In **Bulgaria**, five persons, including activists from the youth LGBT organization Action, were attacked after the Sofia Pride parade.

In **Croatia**, thousands of ultranationalist supporters gathered to protest the first gay pride in the town of Split on June 12. The organizers felt the police failed to sufficiently protect the participants and prevent violence, which left five people injured.

In **Hungary**, fifty Austrian nationals, members of Homosexual Initiative Vienna (HOSI), were attacked with a foul-smelling spray after participating in the Budapest pride parade.

In **Montenegro**, two acts of violence in Podgorica prompted the director of LGBT Forum Press to cancel what was to be Montenegro's first ever gay pride parade.

In **Russia**, Moscow and Saint Petersburg city officials denied permits for gay pride events. Moscow Pride has been denied for six consecutive years, leading to a European Court of Human Rights decision that declared such bans illegal. This year's unauthorized rally was once again marred by violent attacks by ultranationalist supporters and unlawful police detentions.

It should be noted that in the **Central Asian** republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the human rights of LGBTI individuals remain so frail that organizing a public event would likely seriously jeopardize the safety of the activists. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan fail to guarantee even basic freedoms for individuals by legally prohibiting same sex activity between consenting men.

Participating States must not only permit LGBTI pride parades and equality events and gatherings, but guarantee the participants' safety and security. We call on governments to respect OSCE commitments on freedom of assembly and association.