



Marking the International Day Against Homophobia, on Friday 17 May, United Nations officials issued a call on Governments worldwide to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals, and strike laws that discriminate against them.

"The fight against homophobia is a core part of the broader battle for human rights for all," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his remarks to the International Forum on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), held in The Hague, the Netherlands.

"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights promises a world that is free and equal, and we will only honour that promise if everyone – without exception – enjoys the protection they deserve."

In his message, which was delivered by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, Mr. Ban called for more public education to end negative stereotypes and underlined Governments' responsibility to take the lead in promoting greater understanding of the issue.

"We know what needs to be done. Draconian laws used to criminalize and punish LGBT people must be replaced by new laws that are in harmony with universal human rights conventions and protect everyone from discrimination on grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity."

During the same forum, Ms. Pillay stressed that while there has been progress in recent years in overcoming homophobia "many States are still reluctant to acknowledge the extent of violence and discrimination meted out to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex."

Ms. Pillay highlighted three areas that require immediate attention. The first is hate crimes, which "take place with alarming regularity in all regions of the world," and range from bullying to physical assault, torture, kidnapping and murder.

The second concern is the criminalization of homosexuality. Some 76 countries continue to outlaw same sex relationships, violating citizen's right to privacy. Penalties range from jail sentences to execution.

The prevalence of discriminatory practices against LGBT is the third area of concern, and Ms. Pillay noted that in many countries, LGBT individuals lack legal protection by national laws and in some instances States are actively contributing to this type of discrimination.

In 2011, 85 States signed a statement expressing their concern at human rights violations perpetrated against LGBT people, and the UN Human Rights Council adopted the first ever resolution to specifically address the issue.

Last year, the UN Human Rights Office produced a guide to LGBT rights entitled 'Born Free and Equal' that sets out States' core legal obligations.

Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Helen Clark said that in spite of recent progress, much remains to be done to secure LGBT rights. She noted that UNDP is on the ground in over 170 countries and territories, implementing programmes focusing on the rights of all people to access important services and live lives of dignity.

"Many of the people we work with are excluded from development opportunities specifically because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, contributing to the staggering levels of inequality around the world. Such inequalities impede development progress for society as a whole."

Miss Clark added that through its work in human rights, access to justice, and HIV law reform, UNDP is partnering with Government, civil society and the LGBT community in many countries to tackle these gross inequities.

The Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Michel Sidibé said that if the HIV/AIDS epidemic is to be eliminated, there need to be greater efforts to ensure LGBT individuals are not prevented from receiving health services.

"If we are going to end AIDS we need the LGBT community more than ever," Mr. Sidibé told reporters during a press conference at UN Headquarters in New York.

"I am outraged that we still have to fight prejudice, stigma, discrimination, exclusion, criminalization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, not only in their homes, but in their streets, police stations and court rooms.

"It is unacceptable that only one in 10 gay men have access to life-saving HIV services. HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men is 19 times higher than in the general population."

To mark the Day, OHCHR has released a video entitled 'The Riddle' which asks: What exists in every corner of the world but remains illegal in more than 70 countries? The answer: Being gay, being lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Produced in collaboration with the Purpose Foundation, 'The Riddle' was watched by more than 60,000 people within 24 hours of its release on YouTube.

While not an officially observed UN day, the majority of which have been established by the UN General Assembly or designated by UN specialized agencies, the International Day Against Homophobia has become an important day for millions around the world to pause and remember the victims of homophobic violence and discrimination, and to make the case for genuine equality for LGBT people.

Source: [UN News Centre](#)