

May 17, 2011

Statement

On this day in 1990, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that homosexuality was to be taken off its list of mental illnesses, thus ending more than a century of enlisting homosexuality as a mental disorder. Given the importance and symbolism of this date, the international community decided to establish May 17th as the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

However, in many countries -including our Arab nations- this day is either unrecognized or ignored by governments that criminalize homosexuality. Many of us - gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people in the Middle East and North Africa- long for such an opportunity to express our existence; an existence that is forcibly absent from our society. This is also an occasion to acknowledge and affirm our natural sexual orientation and gender identity in which we were born. Being homosexual does not negate our sense of belonging as a member to society, and should not be seen in defiance of our fellow-citizens' perceptions of personal decency.

To honor this global event, we would like to share our message and enlighten everyone that homosexuality has been around since the beginning of the creation of human life in all societies and civilizations. This is evident from the drawings in Pharaoh's temples, the statues in Greek palaces, the religious rites of indigenous people in South America, and the Arabic and Oriental literary heritage that is filled with references to homosexuality. We do not want to change any one's sexual orientation, and it is not our goal to persuade you to accept our gender identity. We want to emphasize that whether you consider homosexuality to be right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, we as human beings have the right to exist peacefully, to be tolerated, and to coexist with others devoid of fear or anxiety. These basic rights are guaranteed by many of our national constitutions as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The truth is, we are your sons, your daughters, your brothers, your sisters, your friends, your colleagues, and your neighbors whether you know about our sexual orientation or not. There is no reason for homosexuality to be stigmatized in the printed and broadcast media, which uses us as subjects of mockery, ridicule, and disrespect because those distorted images that exist in your minds are not necessarily features of our sexual identity.

Despite how some people would like to portray us, homosexuality is never synonymous with failure or psychological imbalance. In those societies where gays are accepted, many of us have become scientists, artists, and great servants to humanity in diverse areas worldwide.

We constantly dream of a world that will embrace human diversity and personal differences for all human beings. We ask you to open your eyes and your hearts in order to see a new color from the colors of life.

Just as the beauty of the rainbow is in blending of all of its colors, the same can be said about human diversity and differences of human identities, whether it is ethnic, cultural, religious, or sexual orientation and gender identities.

Signed on behalf of LGBTQI Arabs (Middle East and North Africa)

Helem/Lebanon –KifKif/Morocco - Aswat/Palestine.

Khomsa Network/ Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania.

Abu Nawas/Algeria.

Bedayaa/Egypt & Sudan - Freedom Sudan /Sudan.

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