

REPORT

Interfaith Preconference of the ILGA-World 2012 9-11 December 2012, Stockholm, Sweden

The Interfaith Preconference of the ILGA World conference "Global Justice, Global Respect" in Stockholm, took place from 9-11 December 2012. This was the very first International interfaith LGBTI conference.

The 39 participants came from 26 countries and represented 22 different organizations in the MENA region, Sub Saharan Africa, Pacific, US, and all parts of Europe, including the Balkan region and Eastern Europe.

The results of the preconference were presented to the main ILGA conference through a workshop.

Background

The background for the conference was the growing negative impact that religious leaders in many countries have on national policies (as well as at International high level meetings) that censor and harm LGBTI people, their families and communities.

The need was to come together to share experiences, to build solidarity and to strategize and coordinate an effective countering of this abuse of religion where it is used to justify persecution and foment fear and homophobia against LGBTI people all over the world. A basic principle of the preconference was to give priority to the experiences and voices of participants coming from countries where this negative impact of religious leaders is most strongly felt.

Funders

The preconference was funded by LLH (the Norwegian LGBT organization)/Ministries of Foreign Affairs Norway, The Arcus Foundation and OSISA.

RFSL was doing most of the logistics, and the Church of Sweden offered the preconference venue for free.

Preparation and facilitation

The preconference was prepared by Judith Kotzé (South Africa), Jan Bjarne Sødal (Norway), Ludovic Mohamed Zahed (France / Algeria) and Michael Brinkschröder (Germany).

Facilitators of the preconference were Judith Kotzé and Jan Bjarne Sødal.

Program and process

Each of the two days were opened by a prayer. The first one a Muslim prayer led by Ludovic Mohamed Zahed and the second a Christian led by Bishop Christopher Senyonjo (Uganda).

Monday

The participants from the Global South, Christians and Muslims, reported about their experiences of dialogue with religious leaders, pointing out approaches that worked well or analyzing why attempts had failed in the past.

Afterwards the work continued in small groups working on the question:

„What are the lessons we have learned from what we have heard? What are the best ways to go forward?“

Tuesday

The second day had the task to digest what was heard and to develop common strategies for the most relevant issues.

Based on the contributions from Monday, the whole group tried to order the themes into several topic areas:

POWER: Fundamentalism, heteronormativity imposed by Westernization, silence – taboo to talk about sexuality; evil patriarchy, chasm between lay and clergy, stigma and discrimination, family pressure, authority abuse and hate speech

HOMO/TRANSPHOBIA: Internalized homophobia, transphobia, prejudice (police), geographical location + isolation, shame, fear of coming out, prejudices against religion among LGBTI, silence – love and compassion, love your enemy

POLITICAL: Intersection of religion and politics, of customary law, religious law & constitutional law, colonial baggage; political agenda, avoid war

MEDIA and LANGUAGE: misinformation and ignorance; global connectedness; language challenges; make material accessible; not too much written material, but oral and visual material.

SAFE SPACES: a) internal, for ourselves b) external, for education of others support groups; take deep breath; long journey towards gradual change; integrating sexuality and spirituality; becoming role models, organizing and mentoring; education on human sexuality; gender definition; sharing life stories, positive narratives, develop guidelines for the creation of safe spaces.

SACRED TEXTS: Interpretation of biblical / qur’anic texts: Sodom/Lot; spread our own interpretation; understand the logic of the religious leaders.

DIALOGUE: excuses for not following up; story telling, real dialogue, credibility and being integrated when dialogue partner; question own identity; networking with religious leaders and allies, tell a human story;

RESOURCES: Service provision (health), unemployment

BUILDING A MOVEMENT – STRATEGIES: build solidarity and common ground; find allies; build a global network, build community, contextualize

RELIGIOUS KEY CONCEPTS

What are key religious concepts for mainstreaming within religion?

Christian: Love and compassion were proposed as key concepts from a Christian point of view.

Muslim: Fairness and justice – is a core language within the Muslim community; „love“ would create even more hostile and aggressive reactions.

The audience was then divided into groups according to regions with the question: How do we continue our work together? What are most important areas to focus on? What is our strategy?

In the following discussion, several points were reaffirmed as especially important:

- Issues and Methodology
- What kind of global network and solidarity do we need within two years?
- Where are the power structures within our network? How do we deal with them and with language disadvantages?
- Safe Space is a crucial necessity in the MENA region.
- Resources – both intellectual and basic oriented

Way forward

It was agreed to form working groups that will follow up the different areas/issues. All working groups should be well mixed. It is important with good representation from the global south. The groups will work throughout the next year, and their results presented during a second conference to take place in Johannesburg late 2013/early/2014.

After lunch, the participants organized themselves and formed 5 working groups to bring central elements from the preconference together as a foundation for the future work of working groups.

1) Creating a „Global Interfaith Network“

2) Methods and guidelines for dialogue with religious leaders

Goal: To produce a resource / booklet with guidelines and best practice models for dialogue with religious leaders.

3) How to create safe space in the MENA region?

1. Within the LGBTI community
2. Educating Northern partners

4) Integrating sexuality and spirituality

5) Resources

1. Interpretation of sacred texts
2. Scientific and social realities of sexual orientation and gender identity as distinct concept / education material
3. Life stories

The report is based on the minutes taken by Michael Brinkschröder and his team from the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups

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During the ILGA main conference, participants were invited to meet in order to further develop the ideas for Way forward:

Web page listing relevant resources:

- Guide line for Dialogue
- Seminars
- “Sodom and Gomorra”
- Integrating Sexuality and Spirituality
- Guide line for safe space
- Retreat
- HIV
- Images of God, Stigma,

Next Global network meeting: December 2013/early 2014 in Johannesburg including Jewish, Hindu, Buddhists and others

- Reports and progress on the different themes, update.
- Support, sharing of stories
- Spiritual
- Capacity building