

LGBTQI+ rights: the UN is calling for equal rights and fair treatment

May 17th marked the *International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)*¹. The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia was created in 2004 to draw the attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics.

On this occasion, leaders from across the UN system called for a world where all people can live free from violence and discrimination². UN rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, reminded that despite the many recent positive changes around the world that resulted from the arduous work of LGBTQI+ human rights defenders, “widespread violations continue: killings, torture, sexual violence, criminalization, and arbitrary detention”.

According to UNESCO, more than one in two LGBTQI students in Europe have suffered bullying based on their sexuality. More precisely, in a survey of more than 17,000 youngsters aged 13 to 24, 54 per cent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people said that they had been bullied at least once, based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The study highlighted widespread discriminatory attitudes, with 83 per cent of students reporting that they had heard negative comments about LGBTQI students, while 67 per cent said that they had been the target of critical comments at least once. Further findings from UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report indicated that nearly six in 10 students never reported bullying incidents to any school staff and fewer than two in 10 did so systematically³.

Furthermore, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), more than one-third of all countries still criminalize same-sex relationships. And LGBTQI people are denied legal protections, essential health care, civil and human rights, including a right to bodily autonomy when forced to go through medical treatment or needless surgery.

This year’s theme *Our Bodies. Our Lives. Our Rights.*⁴ aims to remind us that everyone has the right to fulfil their full potential through exercising bodily

1 <https://may17.org/about/>

2 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118412>

3 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092112>

4 <https://www.unfpa.org/events/international-day-against-homophobia-transphobia-and-biphobia>

autonomy, for it is that right upon which other human rights are built. Ms. Bachelet stressed that “LGBTIQ+ people are entitled to the equal respect for their dignity and equal respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights, just like everyone else”.

Raising concerns over the continued harassment of LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders, discriminatory restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and new proposed discriminatory measures in a number of countries, including some that specifically target trans people, Ms. Bachelet urged States to act with urgency to do more to protect their rights.

UN Women added their voice to the call, in solidarity with “all people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics”. Armed conflicts and the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, have further fueled injustices. According to recent data, an estimated two billion people live in environments where LGBTIQ+ people are treated as criminals.

Only one third of countries protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation; only one tenth protects trans people from discrimination based on gender identity, and less than one in 20 protect intersex people from discrimination.

In addition, UN refugee agency chief Filippo Grandi highlighted the dangers for LGBTIQ+, with too many countries still considering same-sex relationships illegal.

Within this context, the UN Human Rights Office launched a new *UN Free & Equal*⁵ thematic campaign celebrating diverse families that accept and support their members to thrive, no matter who they are, or whom they love.

⁵ <https://www.unfe.org/>