



Beyond Prop 8: International Queer Rights

by: theantidesi101

Mon Dec 15, 2008 at 20:37:42 PM EST

"As faith leaders who work every day with LGBT people who feel the stigma of discrimination, this U.N. initiative speaks to our core belief that we show our love for God when we care for our neighbors, particularly those who are shunned and marginalized."

As American queer and allied activists have been in a flurry over the past few weeks with prop 8 related organizing, another equally important development for queer people has emerged.

This month, perhaps this week, France will introduce to the United Nations General Assembly a statement about human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity, including torture, arbitrary arrest, killings, political, social and economic discrimination and the criminalization of same-sex love.

Let's be clear about this development. The "statement" is not a UN Declaration nor a Resolution, meaning that it will not be binding as international law. Nevertheless, such a move is unprecedented and a sign of how far we've come since the days of Harvey Milk. This pro-LGBT statement comes without the support of the U.S. government, nor has it garnered much interest with LGBT national organizations. Or has it?

I've always seen the American LGBT movement as largely organizing within the confines of America, but perhaps that assumption is an old one. I wonder, have national LGBT groups in America finally decided to support the budding global movement for queer rights on the international level?

Understand why I may seem skeptical about American queer leadership on the fight for international LGBT rights. As the world begins to develop a coordinated international LGBT movement, the U.S. LGBT movement has historically been arrogantly absent from such organizing. Take in point the International Day Against Homophobia:

The international day against homophobia aims to coordinate international events to call respect for lesbians and gays world-wide. Unlike the LGBT Pride Day, which is meant to emphasise proudness of one's sexuality and refusal to be ashamed of it, IDAHO is held to highlight:

"... that in reality it is homophobia that is shameful and must be deconstructed in its social logic and fought against openly."

IDAHO indeed is observed around the world:

This year [actually this article is from 2006], IDAHO has been endorsed by the European Parliament, in its landmark resolution condemning homophobia, passed January 18, as well as by the Belgian Parliament, and will be observed with public actions and demonstrations in more than

50 countries, including China and Iran—but not in the United States.

Neither of the two largest national gay organizations—the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force—has seen fit to join in this international manifestation of solidarity against anti-gay hate. Neither has the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) organized any event to participate in IDAHO.

In 2008 I saw some movement in the U.S. in support of IDAHO however, with the exception of the IGLHRC, our main LGBT national groups have been rather quiet about IDAHO.

Credit where credit is due however, it looks like American queer groups are finally paying attention to international developments on queer rights:

MEDIA CONTACT:

Inga Sarda-Sorensen
Director of Communications
(Office) 646.358.1463
(Cell) 202.641.5592
isorensen@theTaskForce.org

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10 — Faith program directors from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Human Rights Campaign, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and National Black Justice Coalition today issued a joint protest over the Vatican's recent decision to oppose an initiative to decriminalize homosexuality. Advocates are pushing the U.S. State Department to support the initiative and urging media to cover this life and death concern.

The following joint statement was issued on United Nations Human Rights Day and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“For far too long people around the world have been ostracized, imprisoned, tortured and denied basic rights to housing, health care and employment simply because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). In more than 70 countries people can be imprisoned for homosexuality and in several countries it is a crime punishable by death.

My initial reaction to the statement is one of relief. This press statement signals to me that the national LGBT organizations "get it" on faith and that maybe, just maybe, our national organizations might be catching up to the rest of the world on globalizing the queer rights movement:

“As faith leaders we were shocked by Vatican opposition to this proposed initiative. By refusing to sign a basic statement opposing inhumane treatment of LGBT people, the Vatican is sending a message that violence and human rights abuses against LGBT people are acceptable. Most Catholics, and indeed most Catholic teachings, tell us that all people are entitled to live with basic human dignity without the threat of violence. The Catholics we know believe that Scripture asks us to be our brother and our sister's keeper. Many are speaking out against this immoral stance in the name of religion. We urge Vatican leaders to speak out against imprisonment or execution of gay people and support this initiative...

“We urge U.S. leaders to stand against discrimination. It is time to let the teachings of the world's great religions guide us toward justice rather than encouraging prejudice, fear and violence. It is time for the U.S. to stand as a moral leader for all people and to help create a more just world for all of us.”

On the 5th of September in 1995, then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton made a speech that ranks as arguably the greatest speech of her political career:

I believe that, on the eve of a new millennium, it is time to break our silence. It is time for us to say here in Beijing, and the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women's rights as separate from human rights.

A decade into the new millenium, it is time once again to broaden the discussion, and proclaim in front of the world that indeed, LGBT rights can no longer be seperated from human rights. Our rights deserve worldwide recognition and our strength will be joined by the women, indigenou, economically disadvantaged and others worldwide to continue the infinite struggle for equality.

Our national queer groups need to put up to shut up. They need to catch up with the times. As our nation becomes more and more diverse our national queer organizations remain still largely led by whites and most visible in white, urban communities. Perhaps this contributes to our lack of involvement with the global fight for LGBT rights. Whatever the case is, we have a chance now in an Obama era to reclaim our leadership on the international level. Will we take that opportunity?