

Elin Liljenbladh IGLYO
UNESCO International Ministerial Meeting in Paris on 17-18 May
“Education Sector Responses to Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender
Identity/Expression”

Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Friends,

As it has been repeatedly stated human rights are universal and are founded on the core principles of equality and non-discrimination, and are equally relevant to all people.

The United Nations have affirmed States’ obligations to ensure effective protection of all persons from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. However, basic human rights outlined in international law are routinely violated and denied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people.

Homo- and transphobic bullying constitutes a violation of the human rights to education, nondiscrimination and freedom from violence.

Many advances within the UN and other institutions have been made toward ensuring that LGBTQI persons can live with the equal dignity and respect to which all persons are entitled, bringing positive change to youth and children.

Documents including the UDHR, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Yogyakarta principles, highlights the right to access of quality education for all and respect within the learning environment. This means the right to education without discrimination on the basis of, and taking into account, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

For education to be available to everyone on equal terms it has to be inclusive. For over 32 years IGLYO have been working with LGBTQI young people to make school an environment where youth can rise to their full potential. Still, homo- and transphobic bullying continues to be one of the biggest issues for LGBTQI young people. IGLYO advocates for a norm-critical and intersectional approach to inclusive education where discrimination on multiple grounds such as, sex, ability, class, and ethnicity are comprehensively analysed and addressed. Inclusion is a way to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate diversity, realizing we don’t have to be the same to be equal.

For schools to be inclusive and diverse LGBTQI persons must be made visible. School curricula and textbooks often exclude LGBTQI histories, needs, and health information. IGLYO underlines the imminent need for comprehensive LGBTQI and gender mainstreaming in all subjects, including sexuality education.

Lack of positive role models and hiding out for fear of discrimination is an issue that youth continually share with IGLYO. To come to terms with ones identity and the formation of self for youth and children, a diverse representation within the school setting is crucial. Yet, somehow we as LGBTQI people seem to be magical beings as we can walk through history without a trace in history books, although diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions have been existent since the dawn of time. Inclusion means that youth should not have to hide, inclusion means to leave no one behind.

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Numerous pieces of research shows that LGBTIQ young people are up to four times more vulnerable to harassment and violence based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Homo- and transphobia are learned behaviors, children and youth are not innately hateful or phobic. Homo- and transphobic bullying does not start in school, it starts in society at large and finds its way into the classrooms and hallways. Therefore, when we speak about eradicating bullying we have to also be willing to fight homo- and transphobia on a broader societal level and recognize its wide and detrimental impact. Research shows that all parties involved in bullying are impacted; the bullies, the bystanders and the ones targeted with bullying. The impacts are strong and long lasting and experiences continue affect the mental health and well being of LGBTIQ persons also in their work life.

Human rights violations targeting LGBTIQ youth and children constitute a global and entrenched pattern that should raise serious concern. The term bullying is often used to encompass threats, assault and sexual violence amounting to hate crimes, solely because it is affecting children and youth in a school setting. IGLYO is calling leaders to address these actions with the serious response they deserve. We have to realize that people’s lives are at stake (...)and that further inaction means putting youth and children at risk. As leaders we must not allow social attitudes to impede action.

IGLYO has developed several resources to be used by policymakers and educators such as the minimum standards to combat homo- and transphobic bullying and guidelines to inclusive education. Other toolkits and recommendations have been made available by international, national and local organizations for States to use in combating homo- and transphobic bullying. To effectively address homo- and transphobic bullying there need to be inclusive multi-level policies pursued by all relevant stakeholders, systemic data collection to map our issues, training for staff , student support systems, and to ensure youth awareness on their rights.

The extent of the issue is well known and ways to address them have been widely shared. The next step is to respond and prevent homo- and transphobic bullying by implementing the tools provided - and the time to do that is now. The international commitment has been made and will be reaffirmed at this meeting.

The right to education, freedom from violence and non-discrimination goes beyond legal obligations for states. All children and youth should be able to feel safe, respected and appreciated for the person they are.

Today, as representatives of LGBTIQ youth and students, we are looking for the political will to make a difference, we have waited long enough.