

FEATURE STORY ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU: FIGHTING RACISM AND HOMOPHOBIA FROM THE PULPIT

"I have spoken against the injustice of apartheid, racism, where people were penalized for something about which they could do nothing, their ethnicity... I therefore could not keep quiet, it was impossible, when people were hounded for something they did not choose, their sexual orientation."

— Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Archbishop Desmond Tutu responds to a standing ovation from the audience at IGLHRC's *A Celebration of Courage* event in San Francisco.



PHOTO: STEVE FISCHER FOR IGLHRC

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a remarkably humble man. Speaking at IGLHRC's recent *A Celebration of Courage* event in San Francisco, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient and veteran anti-apartheid campaigner demurred at the suggestion that he should be commended for his human rights activism. "I could just as well try not to breathe," he said, downplaying the exceptional commitment it has taken to challenge racism in his own country, and now homophobia internationally.

The Archbishop is world-renowned for his role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and often described as that country's "moral conscience" for persistently speaking out about the evils of racial segregation, especially during the 27 years that African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela was silenced in jail. He was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his extraordinary contributions to this struggle in 1984.

The South Africa that Desmond Tutu struggled to change was defined by a brutal system of white minority rule. Blacks lived as exiles in their own land, segregated from whites and people of mixed race, denied formal citizenship, and forced to obey the "pass laws"—which required them to carry passport-like documents, replete with fingerprints and photographs, at all times—and to show these documents before venturing into white areas.

Tutu first rose to prominence in 1976, when he wrote to the prime minister, warning him that blacks in the townships were becoming increasingly unhappy at the government's discriminatory education policies, and urging him to implement reforms to show that "you and your government....really mean business when you say you want peaceful change." The prime minister ignored Tutu's warning. A month later tensions bubbled over as students began the Soweto Uprising—now recognized as one of the first nails in the coffin for the apartheid era.

But it took 18 more years of active resistance for apartheid to be vanquished. During all that time, Desmond Tutu remained a leading moral voice against racial injustice, urging other nations to impose sanctions on his country, and declaring on behalf of black South Africa that: "We refuse to be treated as the doormat for the government to wipe its jackboots on."

What is especially remarkable is that over the last several years Archbishop Tutu has begun to make direct comparisons between the evils of apartheid and homophobia, declaring them both to be issues fundamentally related to justice.

"I have spoken against the injustice of apartheid, racism, where people were penalized for something about which they could do nothing, their ethnicity," he told IGLHRC. "I therefore could not keep quiet, it was impossible, when people were hounded for something they did not choose, their sexual orientation."

In the face of ongoing persecution, Tutu has praised LGBTI people for being "compassionate, caring, self-sacrificing and refusing to be embittered," and has spoken critically of his Church, apologizing for the way it has ostracized LGBTI people, and for making them feel as if God had made a mistake by creating them to be who they are. "How sad it is," he told IGLHRC, "That the Church should be so obsessed with this particular issue of human sexuality when God's children are facing massive problems—poverty, disease, corruption, conflict...."

It is Archbishop Tutu's capacity to recognize that human beings are inherently valuable and deserve to be treated with justice and respect that makes him such an exemplary human rights activist. IGLHRC was honored to award him its 2008 OUTSPOKEN Award, recognizing the

leadership of a global ally to the LGBTI community whose outspokenness has contributed substantially to advancing the rights and understanding of LGBTI people everywhere.



PHOTO: BILL WILSON

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of IGLHRC's 2008 OUTSPOKEN Award, with Paula Ettelbrick, IGLHRC's executive director.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Paula Ettelbrick,
IGLHRC's executive director

Human rights work takes many different forms—from lobbying the United Nations to fighting local struggles at the grassroots level. In this edition of our newsletter, you'll meet some of the human rights defenders who take

extraordinary measures, every day, to create a safer world for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people around the world. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) was privileged to honor these outstanding individuals (and one pioneering organization) at its recent *A Celebration of Courage* events in New York City and San Francisco. We want to share their inspirational stories here.

The term “human rights defender” may sound technocratic but it's actually a literal designation for someone whose work involves standing up for human rights. The UN, which is often where such formal designations take shape, adopted a Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 1998. Article 1 of this Declaration states that, “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.” This emphasis—that *everyone* can be a human rights

defender—is important. A human rights defender is not a professionalized role but a universal possibility. Or, as the Declaration puts it, “there is a global human rights movement that involves us all.”

As this newsletter goes to print, IGLHRC has just responded forcefully to reports that Gambian President Yahyeh Jammeh has given gay men and lesbians twenty-four hours to leave Gambia, or face “serious consequences.” He has commanded landlords and hotel owners to expel gay men and lesbians from their dwellings. We believe that it is the responsibility of human rights defenders to speak out against these kinds of violent threats. We applaud those brave activists who are outspoken in their defense of human rights, often under the most difficult of circumstances.

In that spirit, we present profiles of several amazing human rights defenders whose activism on behalf of LGBTI people has changed our world for the better. They include Nobel Peace Prize recipient Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the late Representative Tom Lantos, Chilean trans activist Andrés Rivera, and Arsham Parsi from the Iranian Queer Organization. In our small way, IGLHRC has thanked them on behalf of the millions of LGBTI people whose lives are impacted by their collective work. We hope you find their stories as inspiring as we do.

REPRESENTATIVE TOM LANTOS: FROM HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR TO HUMAN RIGHTS CHAMPION

The late Representative
Tom Lantos, a 2008
OUTSPOKEN Award winner.



The late Representative Tom Lantos's commitment to human rights was forged in the most challenging of circumstances. Born to a Jewish family in Budapest in 1928, he was a teenager

when the Nazis invaded Hungary in 1944 and started rounding up Jews. Lantos was sent to a labor camp but escaped—twice—and ended up back in Budapest, living in a safe house established by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

Blonde haired and blue-eyed, Lantos was able to blend in with Hungarian society. But instead of keeping a low profile and focusing on his own survival, he went to work for the resistance, regularly navigating his way through the city to deliver food to other Jews in hiding. “I probably wouldn't survive,” Lantos assumed. “[So] I decided I might be of some use.”

But survive he did—although the experiences he encountered during the occupation took a tremendous toll: “The bloodbath, the cruelty, the death that I saw, so many times around me during those few months between March of 1944 and January of 1945 made me a very old young man,” he said.

At the war's end, Lantos tragically discovered that most of his own family had perished in the Nazi death camps. Miraculously, he managed to locate Annette Tillemann, a childhood friend whom he later married.

Lantos first came to the United States on an academic scholarship in 1947. He earned graduate degrees in economics, and taught at San Francisco State University for several years before being elected to Congress in 1980.

It was in Congress where Lantos made his mark as an outspoken advocate for human rights. “What I do is 1 percent human rights and 99 percent everything else whether it is NATO or China to you-name-it,” said the Congressman, who, at the time of his death, was chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Throughout Lantos's distinguished congressional career, he demonstrated a commitment to human rights for all—including LGBTI people. As the founding co-chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Lantos used his prestige as an internationally respected leader on human rights to hold the very first congressional briefing about the global persecution of sexual minorities. He was the author of the International Human Rights Equality Resolution, which he introduced in the 106th and 107th Congress, condemning human rights violations against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people throughout the world.

Representative Lantos regularly challenged the abuses meted out by individual countries to their LGBTI citizens. Along with key congressional colleagues, he protested the arrests of allegedly gay men in the United Arab Emirates, and the stoning to death of a Nigerian gay man. He also asked Congress to “withhold any support for a U.S.-Egypt Free Trade Agreement” in light of the roundup, conviction and re-conviction of reportedly gay Egyptian men.

Lantos's concern with LGBTI rights violations was not limited to the international area. In the United States, he opposed a Constitutional Amendment banning gay marriage, and worked to amend immigration laws to enable U.S. citizens and permanent residents to sponsor their “permanent partners” for residency. He campaigned for adoption rights and marriage equality for gay and lesbian couples, and supported hate-crimes legislation and anti-discrimination protections in the workplace.

IGLHRC was honored to pay tribute to Rep. Lantos's extraordinary legacy on LGBTI rights by posthumously presenting him with a 2008 OUTSPOKEN Award. He is a true human rights champion who will be greatly missed.

IBM CORPORATION: TRANSFORMING THE WORKPLACE

While talking about a corporation in the same breath as a “human rights defender” might initially seem incongruous, IBM is among those pioneering organizations that have been in the forefront when it comes to supporting LGBT rights and paving the way for LGBT equality. In fact, IBM is the acknowledged global leader in promoting policies around the world supporting LGBT employees.



◀ Joseph Bertolotti accepts a Special Recognition Award on behalf of the IBM Corporation from IGLHRC board co-chair Dorothy Sander.
▶ IBM's Jane Harper.



Even the basic act of recognizing LGBT people in the workplace can be a powerful move. IBM has done that, and much more. In 1984, it was the first major company to add sexual orientation to its United States nondiscrimination policy. It began offering health insurance coverage to employees' domestic partners in 1997, and now provides domestic partner benefits in every country where it is legally possible. In 2002, it amended its U.S. nondiscrimination policy to cover gender identity.

IBM has a Global Task Force of Out Executives who help advance LGBT workplace issues around the world, and 45 LGBT Diversity Network Groups worldwide, throughout the United States, Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

As Jane Harper, the Director of Collaborative Innovation at IBM, told IGLHRC: “As a globally integrated enterprise, it is important for our employees to feel welcomed, valued and safe at work, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or the country that they work in.... Just as the ‘I’ in IGLHRC stands for “international” so does the ‘I’ in IBM!” By leading the way toward equality in the global workplace, IBM Corporation sends a clear message that LGBT people matter.

ARSHAM PARSI: MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Arsham Parsi exists. And just this fact confounds the claims of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who back in September insisted that, “In Iran, we don’t have homosexuals like in your country.... We don’t have that in our country.” Parsi is almost synonymous with the Iranian Queer Organization (IRQO), the organization he founded in 2001 and built from the ground up after two of his gay friends committed suicide in Iran.

IRQO began as an internet-based chat group inside Iran, designed to create moral support for a group of gay men and lesbians living under a regime mandating the death penalty for same-sex intimacy. Over the last seven years—despite limited financial resources and constant threats from the Iranian authorities—IRQO has become the voice of thousands of Iranian queers, based both inside Iran and overseas. Parsi has dedicated his life to the cause, selflessly working around the clock and without pay to ensure that Iranian queers are not forgotten or ignored.

Today, Parsi’s IRQO plays a key role in documenting LGBT rights violations in Iran and in mobilizing public opinion to pressure Iranian authorities to end the inhumane treatment of sexual minorities. It also supports Iranian refugees and asylum seekers who are forced to leave their country, offers phone counseling to its members, and publishes regular articles on homosexuality in Iran.



Felipa De Souza Award winner Arsham Parsi.

Parsi himself says that IRQO’s main achievement has been to make homosexuality visible in Iran—creating a public discourse that was previously entirely lacking, and “bringing the issue of sexual minorities in Iran...into kitchen-table conversations and seminars, under the banner that queer rights are human rights.”

By being the face of the Iranian queer movement and by telling the stories of LGBT Iranians, Parsi shows the international community that in spite of many problems the Iranian queer movement is very much alive and demands equality, dignity and justice.

“I hope there will be a day when IRQO will reach such a level of success that no Iranian queer will be discriminated against, tortured, executed, or mocked, and when their rights will be respected by all,” Parsi told IGLHRC. “That day will come; we just need to keep on working toward it.”

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– Arsham Parsi

ANDRÉS IGNACIO RIVERA DUARTE: FORGING A NEW FUTURE

“Not conforming to the patterns of men and women established by society is a real challenge,” said Andrés Ignacio Rivera Duarte, a trans man and pioneering human rights defender who founded and heads Organización de Transexuales por la Dignidad de la Diversidad, the first NGO in Chile dedicated to fighting for trans people’s rights.

Rivera knows first-hand the hardship that trans people must confront. He told IGLHRC that trans people in Chile are forced to undergo invasive medical procedures, hormone therapies and sex reassignment surgeries—all to be acknowledged as human.



Andrés Ignacio Rivera Duarte receives a Felipa De Souza Award from Julie Dorf, IGLHRC’s founder.

The authorities “don’t care if we have pre-existing conditions that makes hormone therapy or surgery hazardous,” he said. “They don’t care if we have the money to pay for that, or if our life is at risk. All this to submit a name and sex change petition which is finally up to a judge to accept...or not.”

That a Chilean trans person can submit this type of petition to a judge represents progress, much of it due to Rivera’s own persistence. He fought a landmark lawsuit, bringing issues of gender identity into the public view, and finally winning the right for trans people to legally change their name and sex in 2007.

This remarkable achievement only scratches the surface of Rivera’s extraordinarily wide-ranging activist agenda. He has worked with government and the local health system to simplify processes for the evaluation, treatment and surgery of trans people, and organized a debate on the Civil Union Pact. But his work is not just with high-level officials; he also provides direct support to sex workers—visiting them nightly to distribute coffee, food and information about HIV/AIDS.

Although Rivera fully acknowledges that social nonconformity can bring consequences “such as discrimination, bullying, unemployment, pain, violence and occasionally death,” he remains optimistic in the face of all these challenges, emphasizing that it can also precipitate “growth as a human being, and growth in the fight for equality, justice and dignity.” As the first Chilean trans man to marry, he demonstrates just that—and embodies hope for the future of trans people in Chile.

NEW IGLHRC PROJECTS

IGLHRC recently launched a set of initiatives and activities in partnership with LGBTI groups and allies related to two of its top priorities: 1) Challenging the specific forms of violence and discrimination faced by lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) women, and 2) Ending the criminalization of homosexuality and the abuse related to arbitrary arrests of LGBTI people.

IGLHRC's work to challenge violence against LBT women involves active participation in the 16 Days of Activism, an international campaign spearheaded by the Center for Women's Global Leadership between November 25 and December 10, 2008 and designed to draw attention to the fact that violence against women is a human rights violation.

In **Asia**, IGLHRC will work with LBT activists throughout the region to host a traveling banner and a series of public events designed to draw attention to violence against LBT women. The events will be filmed and personal stories documented. The banner and public events will kick off in Thailand and culminate in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on December 10, 2008, the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Along the way, women will discuss the use of the Yogyakarta Principles—a set of principles that describe how international human rights law applies to sexual orientation and gender identity—in combating domestic and social violence faced by LBT women. The film will be released in 2009.



Lesbian activists demonstrate on the International Day Against Homophobia in Jakarta, Indonesia.

In **Latin America**, IGLHRC will hold panels and public presentations in Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua in conjunction with the release of its report from its 2007 Human Rights Advocacy Institute for lesbian and bisexual women leaders from Central America and the Caribbean. At each panel, lesbian activists will address the application of the Yogyakarta Principles to their work in the region. In November 2008, IGLHRC will partner with Catholics for a Free Choice in hosting its 3rd Latin America and Caribbean Human Rights Advocacy Institute, which will address religious fundamentalism and its specific impact on LBT women. Participants will release a public statement on December 10, International Human Rights Day.

In **Africa**, IGLHRC will draw attention to the murders of lesbians through poster advertisements placed in newspapers and circulated on the internet during the 16 Days of Activism. The advertisements will demand that authorities step up to their responsibility to investigate these murders and speak out forcefully in condemning them.

This year, IGLHRC will also launch a series of initiatives related to its goal of ending the criminalization of homosexuality and the human rights abuses that accompany detention and arrests. IGLHRC's primary strategy is to concentrate on the states that are members of the British Commonwealth, whose laws criminalizing sexuality are vestiges of their colonial histories. These countries include many former British colonies in Asia, the Caribbean and Africa. IGLHRC will work closely with Commonwealth members who have repealed their sodomy laws, as well as with those that have not. IGLHRC will report on the tangible progress made toward decriminalization every year on May 17, the International Day Against Homophobia.

RECENT IGLHRC REPORTS

Over the last several months, IGLHRC's staff has been busy producing reports for a variety of UN committees and other audiences. The following documents can be found on our website at www.iglhrc.org:

- **Shadow Report to the UN Committee Against Torture on the Rights of LGBT in Costa Rica** April 21, 2008
- **Human Rights and LGBT People in Romania - Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review** February 8, 2008
- **Human Rights and Transgender People in Pakistan - Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review** February 6, 2008
- **Nepal Supreme Court Case on Relief for Sexual and Gender Minorities: Observers' Report** December 12, 2007
- **Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Human Rights of LGBT Adolescents in Chile** December 12, 2007
- **Shadow Report on the Human Rights of Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender and Intersex Women in Bolivia** December 5, 2007
- **Human Rights Abuses Against Sexual Minorities in Indonesia** November 26, 2007

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