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International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission • October 2006

IGLHRC WORKS ON BEHALF OF DETAINEES IN CAMEROON



Some of the Cameroon detainees and human rights defender Alice Nkom

On May 21, 2005, Cameroonian law enforcement agents stormed an outdoor nightclub popular with the local gay and lesbian community in the Cameroonian capital, Yaoundé, and arrested several dozen people. Over the next few days, most of those arrested were able to negotiate for their freedom, but 11 of the arrestees, all young men between the ages of 17 and 35 with few resources, were

charged with "homosexuality" and sent to the notorious Kondengui Prison.

While homosexuality itself is not a crime, Article 347 of Cameroon's penal code makes sodomy an offense punishable by up to five years in prison. Although the law is rarely enforced, homophobia and anti-gay violence is common in Cameroon and has forced most same-gender loving people to live in secrecy and constant fear of exposure. Same-sex practicing people face discrimination in their homes, workplaces, at health care facilities and in the courts. IGLHRC believes that within the last year at least 30 young people, mainly girls, have been expelled from their schools on suspicion of same-sex behavior and identity.

The arrests of young men at the bar were first reported by the local newspaper and soon were picked up by national and local TV stations, which aired images of the detainees being paraded in front of television cameras shortly after their arrest. The case garnered significant publicity nationally and caused pain and embarrassment for the men and their families.

Within days after their arrests, IGLHRC's Africa Specialist, Cary Johnson, issued a statement to alert the international community of the crackdown in Cameroon. The announcement was followed by a letter-writing campaign on behalf of the detainees, co-sponsored by "Behind the Mask", a South Africa-based regional LGBT media and human rights organization. IGLHRC also found a local attorney to take the case and provided legal assistance while the men were detained. The attorney, Mr. Duga Titanji, successfully petitioned for the youngest man, only 17 at the time of his arrest, to be transferred into a juvenile facility. IGLHRC worked with the Trauma and Rehabilitation Center, a local prisoner relief group, to help the men to withstand the harsh conditions of detention at Kondengui.

In September 2005, the government finally recognized that it lacked any evidence to convict the men of sodomy and proposed to conduct forensic anal examinations on the men to "prove" their homosexuality. IGLHRC and seven other human rights organizations, both American and African, delivered a letter to the Minister of Justice of Cameroon urging him to release the 11 men detained and to prevent the humiliating and scientifically useless "medical examination" proposed by the prosecution. In his January

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IGLHRC HELPS WITH THE FIRST PAN-EASTERN EUROPEAN PRIDE

On Saturday, June 23, the Croatian capital played host to Zagreb Pride 2006, the first Pan-East European Pride event of its kind. During the four-hour historic march, close to 300 participants walked through downtown Zagreb holding banners with the March's official slogan, "Live Freely." Afterwards, the crowd gathered in one of the capital's parks to listen to speeches and live concerts. Caroline Sykora, IGLHRC's Policy and Research Associate and a specialist on Eastern Europe, conducted an ILGA-Europe/IGLHRC human rights documentation training and participated in a round table discussion entitled "The Freedom of Assembly and Pride Violence."

In collaboration with a representative from ILGA Europe, Christine Loudes, Caroline trained LGBT activists, mainly from the former Yugoslavia, on documenting human rights violations. The training concluded with developing a monitoring strategy tailored to the Zagreb march. The newly trained activists put this strategy into action on the day of the demonstration, ensuring the safety of the participants and preventing disturbances during the event.

In response to recent threats and the history of violence during previous pride events, more than 100 police officers—heavily stationed and dressed in full riot gear—escorted the participants in the pride march. The presence of a number of LGBT activists from neighboring



Heavy police presence among the marchers at a congested corner halfway through the march.

Serbia increased anxiety among the police. Ongoing tensions between Croatia and Serbia stemming from the recent Balkan war posed additional challenges to pride organizers and the police in ensuring the safety of the marchers. Although the Pride ended peacefully, a week later two men were attacked outside of a gay club in the Croatian capital.

Zagreb Pride was organized by a coalition of national, regional and international organizations, including Zagreb Pride Committee, SEE Q Network (South Eastern European Queer Network of LGBTIQ activist from former Yugoslavia), various queer groups from the Balkan region and the larger Eastern Central Europe (including Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland).

Zagreb Pride took place against a backdrop of threats and violent incidents surrounding similar gatherings in various Eastern European countries. This summer in Poland the deputy leader of the League of Polish Families publicly condoned the use of physical force to stop the gay parade from happening. Speaking about the would-be marchers on the eve of the 2006 Warsaw pride he was quoted as saying:

"They're just gays. A couple of baton strikes will deter them from coming again. Gays are cowards by definition."

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Dusty Araújo, Asylum Documentation Program Coordinator
Mauro Cabral, Project Consultant, Transgender & Intersex Issues
Adrian Coman, Program Manager
Timothy Dorsey, Deputy Director
Paula Ettelbrick, Executive Director
Marcelo Ferreyra, Regional Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean
Maria-Elena Grant, Operations Manager
Cary Alan Johnson, Senior Program Specialist for Africa
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HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN*

By Paula L. Ettelbrick



For the past 27 years, close to seventy million Iranians have been living under an oppressive theocracy which, among other things, limits the access of its citizens to the international community, subjects them to harsh punishments for the most venial offenses, and deprives them of their basic social and political rights. Gay men and lesbians are particularly vulnerable, since the regime considers homosexuality among the most serious crimes, on a par with murder, armed robbery, and rape.

However, the Iranian sexual minorities are not the only group at the receiving end of such a systematic oppression. The Iranian regime has shown the same zero-tolerance for various religious, ethnic and political minorities in Iran. For the ruling Mullahs in Tehran, the name of the game is conformity.

Fortunately, the Iranian civil society is not sitting silently by. Over the past decade, numerous grassroots movements have risen in Iran. Most of these groups are independent, small, and loosely organized associations of concerned citizens trying to make piece-meal improvements in their lives, away from any political controversy. These activists present the biggest challenge to the ruling establishment. By demanding a more just environment, these everyday heroes are the main force behind the possibility of social change in this fortress of tyranny.

Most Iranian activists have one thing in common: little interest in being pushed by outsiders (unlike their LGBT Russian and Polish counterparts who encourage involvement from Western activists in their quest for freedom). Perhaps the examples of neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan have taught them that only a social consensus, and not an outside intervention, can bring about a better future for their country.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission is fully committed to assisting our Iranian colleagues. We believe that inaction and silence in the face of such horrendous and consistent persecution in Iran is not an option for human rights activists. Yet, it is also not an option to respond without working very closely with the Iranian community, both in the country and around the world, for the simple reason that it is their lives at stake, not our own.

So what does this mean in terms of action? First, we believe that public discussions that involve Iranian activists at the center of the discussion is a critical first step – like the “teach-ins” of the 1960’s that helped spawn the anti-war movement. Learning about society in Iran, the sentiments of activists working within the country, as well as those outside, and how to work with them rather than parallel to them is essential. Second, we are committed to supporting the strength and capacity of Iranian human rights groups in whatever way we can, as we are well aware that it is their voices, not ours, that must prevail.

Working in this way may not provide the immediate gratification of a demonstration at the Iranian Embassy or insistent letters to George Bush to take action. In fact, the process of working with Iranian LGBT activists and responding to their specific needs and requests may prove to be long and painstakingly slow to activists in democratic societies where our public voice is a given and our visibility so much less likely to provoke arrest and punishment – even death. But for those of us eager to find a quick fix to this problem, the ongoing civil war and chaos in Iraq is a sobering reminder that culturally insensitive solutions can only inflict more suffering on the very people we intend to assist.

LGBT Iranians, and their fellow citizens, are entitled to humane treatment by their government. Iranian society has the potential to move in that direction, and we are here to work closely with our Iranian colleagues and their allies to ensure that their voices are being heard across the globe.

*A revised version of this piece was first published as an Op-Ed in the Aug 13, 2006 issue of the Gay City News.

IGLHRC'S 2006 FELIPA DE SOUZA AWARD GOES TO PALESTINIAN ACTIVIST

Palestinian activist Rauda Morcos won IGLHRC's 2006 Felipa de Souza Award. Rauda is the founder and coordinator of ASWAT (Voices), the first Palestinian lesbian group in the region. Every year, IGLHRC presents the Felipa Award to courageous individuals and organizations working for the fundamental human rights of all people. The award is designed to bring about public recognition to grassroots activists in their struggle for human rights and offers a \$5,000 stipend to assist and strengthen the ability of grassroots human rights groups to do their work.

A group photo at the end of Celebration of Courage in New York, May 23, 2006.

Top row: Hossein Alizadeh, Dorothy Sander, Paula Ettelbrick. Bottom row: Tom Dougherty, Rauda Morcos, Andy Tobias, Cary Alan Johnson.



Rauda received the award at IGLHRC's 2006 *Celebration of Courage* event, held on May 23 in New York City and on May 25 in San Francisco. Also honored for their commitment for helping IGLHRC fulfill its human rights missions were Andrew Tobias and Paul Albert.

Rauda co-founded ASWAT in January 2003 as a place for Palestinian lesbian women to meet face to face and to discuss and share ideas with one another. Since its founding, ASWAT has grown and developed a range of urgently needed programs under her guidance.

Currently, ASWAT has organized support groups in rotation in Haifa (its headquarters), Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, provided assistance to individuals in crisis situations, conducted media outreach, and coordinated educational activities. ASWAT programs and services include advocacy outreach and education, monthly support group meetings, a support line for lesbians, and publication of LGBTQI materials in Arabic.

"Rauda Morcos is a true example of courageous and effective human rights leadership," said Paula Ettelbrick, IGLHRC Executive Director who announced Rauda's nomination for the prestigious award. "By founding ASWAT and being so visible as a lesbian, Rauda has helped turn fear into hope for so many others. We are proud to celebrate her accomplishments this year and to support her work."

Also with its Special Recognition Award, IGLHRC honored Andrew Tobias. Andy is a longtime IGLHRC benefactor, whose support for our mission dates back to 1992 when he traveled as part of an IGLHRC fact-finding delegation to Russia. He is a well-known journalist, author and columnist, who more than three decades ago wrote the famous coming out memoir "Best Little Boy in the World." More recently as the Treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, Andy promotes LGBT issues on the national political stage.

In a congratulatory letter, Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA) paid tribute to Andy for using "his success in various aspects of American life as a platform on which to build his broader effort to fight for the rights of victims of sexual orientation and sexual identity prejudice everywhere."



Celebration of Courage Ceremony in San Francisco, May 25, 2006.

L-R: Paula Ettelbrick, Julie Dorf, Paul Albert, Rauda Morcos, Dipti Ghosh, Pamela Merchant.

A Special Recognition Award was also presented in San Francisco to Paul Albert, who is one of IGLHRC's longest time supporters. Shortly after IGLHRC's founding, Paul, a lawyer by profession, wrote the human rights training manual that has guided our work all these years. In addition, Paul was one of the first major donors to IGLHRC and has been a consistent and generous contributor since 1992. He has been very supportive of IGLHRC's efforts to support grassroots organizing and local LGBT groups throughout the world.

IGLHRC'S TRAINS LATIN AMERICAN INTERSEX AND TRANS ACTIVISTS

"Gays and lesbians ignore us, judge us and use us"... "When they see you they tell you you're a freak, an aberration." These were some of the most uncomfortable, yet painfully honest comments made by a group of intersex and trans activists who attended first IGLHRC's Human Rights Training Institute. The first session of the Training Institute, held between October 19 and November 1, 2005 in Argentina, was dedicated to intersex and trans issues. 20 participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela participated in the training.

The Training Institute is a new initiative by IGLHRC's Latin American and Caribbean Program (LAC), and is meant to empower LGBT and human rights advocates throughout the region by providing a two week intense training session on human rights, advocacy, organizational development, and politics of the movement.

The dedication of IGLHRC's first-ever Training Institute to trans and intersex issues recognized the unfortunate fact that trans and intersex people are the most vulnerable members among us. They not only suffer the most brutal human rights violations by society, but are also treated unkindly by some gay and lesbian groups for not having conventional identities and gender expressions.

The Trans and Intersex Training Institute was structured around three main themes: trans and intersex theory and politics, organizational

development, and human rights. Among issues discussed in the training were communications, funding strategies for organizations, documenting violations of the human rights of trans and intersex persons, managing activist groups, forging alliances, organizing community support networks, organizational development, and human rights theories and practice in Latin America.

As part of the training, participants also shared their personal stories and experiences. Many of those present talked about feeling extremely lonely. One activist explained that he was so lonely that "I stayed and pretended to be prostitute myself just so I could have a group to be with." Others told stories of harassment and persecution, and of abuse and rape in police stations and jails. Although there were many stories of discrimination and

A group photo of some of the participants at the Training Institute:

Andres Rivera, Marlene Wayar, Belissa Andia, Yhajaira Marciano Bravo, Diana Sacayan, Marcelo Ferreyra, Silvia Martinez, Jana Villayzan, Rosa Posa, Monica Hernandez, Alejandro Escobar, and Danielle Pulido Alamo.



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IGLHRC members make a difference!

By becoming a member and supporting IGLHRC, you affirm the importance of securing the full enjoyment of human rights for all people and communities subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of sexual orientation or expression, gender identity or expression, and/or HIV status. As an IGLHRC member, you'll stay updated about emergency situations through our action alerts and newsletters, and you'll be invited to attend public education events that address human rights issues around the world.

How Can I Become an IGLHRC Member?

Donate Directly

Starting at only \$25 (for students) or \$40 (for other community members), donate online or by mail. Members receive our newsletters and annual reports. For a donation of **\$250 or more, you'll receive a DVD copy of the film *Unveiled***, the moving story of an Iranian lesbian who assumes the identity of a man to gain temporary asylum in Germany. This offer is available while our DVD supplies last!

Global Dignity Fund

Establish a monthly donation that can be billed directly to your credit card – to save time and reduce the use and waste of paper!

Employer's Matching Gift Program

Increase the impact of your donation by participating in your employer's matching gift program whereby your donation is matched at a designated amount by your company or firm – allowing you to double or even triple your gift! Check with your employer to learn if a matching gift program is available.

Support IGLHRC today by filling out the enclosed return envelope to begin or renew your membership!

Other Ways to Support IGLHRC:

- Donate Stocks, Bonds, Mutual Funds, or Securities
- Nominate IGLHRC to Charity Giving Programs
- Host a party to encourage your friends to become IGLHRC members
- Sponsor *A Celebration of Courage*, IGLHRC's Human Rights Awards Event
- Donate in-kind services, provide event space, or volunteer your time
- Include IGLHRC in your Estate Planning

For more information about supporting IGLHRC, please visit our website at www.iglhrc.org, call 212-430-6057 or send an email to rlied@iglhrc.org.

WE'VE MOVED!

Please note the new contact information for
IGLHRC's New York office:

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission

80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038

phone: 212.268.8040 • fax: 212.430.6060 • web: www.iglhrc.org

IGLHRC SUPPORTS LGBT VOICES AT AFRICAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Cameroonian activist Sybille Nyeck delivering the first-ever statement on LGBT issues to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights during its May session. IGLHRC worked with LGBT groups, the All African Rights Initiative, the Coalition of African Lesbians,

and Behind the Mask, to coordinate the first out-LGBT representation at the Commission in Banjul, The Gambia. During this historic week, 18 African LGBT activists met with human rights experts from the Commission as well as with other human rights organizations.

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2006 response to the IGLHRC letter, the Cameroonian Minister of Justice, Mr. Amadou Ali, justified the continued detention of the 11 men as ensuring "that positive African cultural values are preserved." According to Mr. Ali, "Homosexuality is not a value accepted in the Cameroonian society."

After months of unjustified detention and delays, the trial of the young men was set for March 17, 2006. Just days before the trial, two of the men were released, ostensibly due to lack of evidence. On the eve of the trial, public discourse on homosexuality was extremely hostile. Newspapers in Cameroon had printed lists of well-known public figures about whom the newspapers claim to have proof of homosexuality. In a separate case, two other men had been arrested and quickly sentenced to a year in prison for a consensual homosexual encounter.

Though the prosecution presented no witnesses or evidence at trial, the magistrate refused to dismiss the case, and instead postponed the proceeding until April 21. When court convened again, the prosecution again did not offer any witnesses or proof of the charges against the defendants, and the presiding magistrate, Judge Tonye, dismissed the case, because the crime with which the men were charged—homosexuality—doesn't exist. The men expected to be released from prison quickly, but prosecutors refused to order their release and instead filed new charges—sodomy.

On June 12, 2006, at the end of a second and equally empty trial, two of the nine men were acquitted and the remaining seven were found guilty and sentenced to a 10-month jail term. Since the men had already been detained for more than one year, they were released for time served.

Among those convicted was 30-year-old Alim Mongoche, a clothing designer and person living with AIDS. After more than a year in a prison without the most basic medical facilities, Alim was taken straight to the hospital upon his release, where he died ten days later of AIDS-related complications.

The other men are trying to move on with their lives with help from Alternatives Cameroon, a local LGBT organization. A variety of other rights groups, including the Astraea Foundation, the Organization Mondiale Contre la Torture (OMCT), and Amnesty International, are helping the men to reintegrate into their disrupted lives, but it is not easy.

IGLHRC knows of at least four women recently convicted on sodomy (sic) charges and released and four other men who are languishing at Kondogui Prison. No one can say how many others may be in prison or at risk of arrest as you read this article.

Intersex and Trans Activists continued from page 3

abuse, overall the Institute was an experience of joy and bonding, which provided the participants with an opportunity to connect to other activists and feel less isolated and more empowered.

Participants in the Institute benefited from incredible trainers, which included IGLHRC's staff Alejandra Sardá and Mauro Cabral, and trans activists Belissa Andía, Marlene Wayar and Lohana Berkins. Major support from UNAIDS and UNIFEM, as well as individual donations. IGLHRC LAC Program staff, Rosa Posa and Marcelo Ferreyra helped coordinate the training.

