

A Celebration of Courage – May 12, 2014
Remarks by Grace Poore introducing the Felipa de Souza Honorees

Tonight is special.

In less than 24 hours, we will launch a report: [***Violence: Through the Lens of Lesbians, bisexual women and Trans People in Asia***](#), the results of a multi-year, multi-country project to highlight one of the most heart-breaking truths we all at some point or another have had to face: the fact that however much violence, exclusion, and discrimination we may face at school, at work, or in our communities, what we remember, what hurts us the most, is the violence and ostracism we face at home.

Over the past 3 years, IGLHRC has worked closely with partners in Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka to document violence faced by the most marginalized members of our communities, and often also the most invisibilized: lesbians, bisexual women, and trans people. Our partners gathered over 230 interviews with individuals who, in many cases, had not been able to share the truths about their lives, about the multiple violations and isolation in which they had to cope with these experiences, and in many, many instances, with only their personal resilience to survive what they could not tell.

I am deeply moved by the trust these individuals placed in IGLHRC and in our partners. And I cannot wait to repay that trust by using the resulting report—the report we are launching tomorrow—to advocate with politicians, policy makers, activists, journalists, NGOs working with families, civil society groups... anyone who will listen – about the change our research has identified as so sorely needed.

I think you will agree with me that this powerful work should be disseminated to as many people as possible. To do that requires funding. Later tonight, we're going to let you know how you can help.

Now – our partners in this project who could not be with us on this very special night have a special message for you in this video.

[\[Video\]](#)

As you can see from this short clip, the project was not easy.

Many of the women and trans individuals who were interviewed had come to see the violence they faced as inevitable. Some even talked about it as perhaps justified because they had defied established codes of conduct, disrupted the family unit, hurt their parents, and brought unwanted attention to their family. They lived in country contexts, where non-conforming sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression was criminalized, condemned, punished. In other words, the research helped us see the narrow connection between strict gender norms and violence and discrimination.

No one understands this better than **Jay Kuru-Utumpala**, who we are honoring here today for her coordination of the Sri Lanka portion of the research, and for her amazing contributions to the global LGBT movement. Jay is representing the five country teams who are all being honored with the Felipa award this year.

Jay is a long time scholar and activist on sexuality, gender norms, and queer theory. Her current work with young men to prevent violence by reframing gender equality is a testament to her visionary approach. Jay's steady commitment and deep understanding of the social and historical contexts of homophobia and transphobia in Sri Lanka is part of why interviewees and interviewers alike trusted her. These are just a few reasons I am so honored to call Jay a friend. An avid rock-climber, Jay is the rock of her community. Please join me in a standing ovation for an outstanding human being.