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Remarks Delivered at High-Level Meeting on Ministerial Declaration to End Violence and Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

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Good afternoon.

I want to begin by thanking the Dutch Government and the Core Group for convening this meeting.

On behalf of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, I wish to express our deep appreciation for the resources you have invested to protect and promote the basic dignity of those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

As we celebrate this historic meeting, I want to acknowledge that we are not in an easy fight.

It is not a fight for a comma or the mere mention of the plight of LGBT people in a United Nations resolution.

It is, for many, a fight for our lives.

It is a fight fundamentally about privilege. Privilege based on gender and sexuality, but inextricably linked to race, ethnicity, bodily autonomy, class, ability, health status, and every other movement for universal human rights. It bears remembering that the rights of the most vulnerable are a litmus test to the strength of the rule of law for all.

Today, many of the speakers highlighted recent advances for LGBT rights. These successes are the result of our joint dedication -- a dedication needed now more than ever.

We all know that more than 76 countries still criminalize consensual same-sex relations, and many other laws target people on the basis of their gender identity or expression.

But the time has come to utilize UN mechanisms and the will of the global community --- via ministerial declarations, resolutions, statements and beyond -- to address other punitive laws and the difference between their formal meaning and their application. For instance:

Morality laws are often used to target those who are perceived to transgress gender and sexual codes.

Laws that restrict women's autonomy make it impossible for lesbians, bisexual women and transgender people to enjoy full human rights.

In recent years, we have even seen the same old prejudice dressed up in a shiny new package: stop the spread of LGBT "propaganda," they claim, and stop those dangerous human rights defenders.

In truth, any message that it is acceptable to exclude, assault or kill someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity amounts to true danger.

In conclusion, today, I am privileged to speak with those of you who wield great power to influence people's lives, and it is with great respect that I appeal to you to hold the line and keep us advancing: ensure that legal standards clearly prohibit discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and make sure that those laws are enforced. We ask not for a mere comma or a resolution. We ask for human rights for everyone, everywhere.

Thank you.