



**INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

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April 3, 2015

Re: State Endorsement of Conversion Therapy for Gays and Lesbians in South Korea

Minister Hyung-pyo Moon
Ministry of Health and Welfare
13, Doum 4-ro,
Sejong 339-012, Korea

Mr. Sang-min Kim
Speaker
#1015 National Assembly Member's Office Bldg
Yeouido-dong, Yeongdeungpo-gu,
Seoul 150-702, Korea

Dr. Byung-cheol Hyun
Chairperson
National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK)
Gumsegi Bldg., 6, Mugyo-ro, Jung-gu,
Seoul 100-842, Korea

Dear Minister Hyung-pyo Moon
Dear Mr. Sang-min Kim
Dear Dr. Byung-cheol Hyun

I write to you from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) to express concern with two recent convenings by anti-LGBT hate organizations in South Korean government buildings that convey the troubling impression of the government's tacit endorsement of so-called "conversion therapy" and tolerance for discrimination against LGBT Koreans.

IGLHRC is an international non-governmental organization with offices around the world and special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). We work through documentation and advocacy to advance effective human rights enjoyment for everyone, regardless of real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

On November 18, 2014, a coalition of three groups known to oppose equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans persons, namely Holy Life, Chosen People Network, and People's Solidarity for Healthy Society held an "Ex-Gay Human Rights Forum" at the Sixth Meeting Room of the National Assembly Members Office Building with permission granted by the National Assembly Speaker, Mr. Sang-min Kim.

Subsequently, on March 19, 2015, this same coalition held a “Second Ex-Gay Human Rights Forum,” on the premises of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK), with the authorization of Mr. Yong-gook Kim, who is chief of the Communications and Cooperation Division of the NHRCK.

Calling these seminars human rights forums is manifestly deceptive. These groups, which make up a small minority of the Christian population in South Korea, are known to use religious rhetoric to encourage panic in families who are already worried about the stigma and discrimination they and their LGBT family members may face. As noted in the *Christian Daily* last month, these groups actively promote the unscientific and inaccurate notion that homosexuality is “an addiction” that must be rejected, and that can be “cured” through conversion therapy.ⁱ Through this advocacy, the groups encourage families to reject an integral part of the personhood of their LGBT family members, directly contributing to stigma and discrimination.

Conversion therapy has been internationally debunked as faulty psychology that is driven by anti-gay bigotry. It has no scientific merit.ⁱⁱ These kinds of therapy practices contribute to the exclusion, discrimination and even violence against individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT).

Furthermore, one of the groups, Holy Life, held a rally to protest LGBT Pride events in June 2014. This rally was part of a coordinated assault by anti-LGBT groups that repeatedly violated the law by physically blocking legally permitted LGBT Pride events in Seoul on June 8, 2014 and in Daegu on June 28, 2014. In addition, on November 20, 2014, the People’s Solidarity for Healthy Society used physical and verbal aggression to prevent panelists from speaking at a public hearing on the Seoul Charter on Human Rights because the Charter contained language inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. As a consequence of their disruption, the public hearing was shut down.ⁱⁱⁱ

By allowing the premises of public institutions to be used by groups that promote discrimination against LGBT persons, and by granting permission for seminars that incite violations of the human rights of LGBT persons, the government is giving legitimacy to these groups. The outcomes and acts of these groups and seminars, while being held on public grounds, can therefore be interpreted as state-sponsored advocacy of hatred that could incite discrimination or violence.

So far, NHRCK has failed to denounce conversion therapy and has turned a blind eye to the actions of anti-LGBT groups. Furthermore, the government in November 2014 appointed an individual who has publicly spoken out against LGBT rights and opposed inclusion of sexual orientation in the Anti Discrimination Bill to serve as a commissioner on the NHRCK.^{iv} This leads members of the LGBT community in South Korea as well as IGLHRC to question the credibility of the NHRCK and its effectiveness as a human rights institution.

In other arenas, South Korea has been a champion of LGBT rights. South Korea distinguishes itself favorably as being one of the very few Asia Pacific states that consistently votes in favor of United Nations resolutions to protect the right of LGBT persons to a life free of discrimination

and violence. The 2001 National Human Rights Commission Act also explicitly names sexual orientation among the prohibited grounds for discrimination in South Korea. At a regional workshop in Bangkok convened by the Asia Pacific Forum in March 2015, a representative of the NHRCK stated that the NHRCK defends sexual minorities from discrimination and includes sexual orientation and gender identity in its human rights education programs.^v We have celebrated these statements. However, the actions of Speaker Sang-min Kim and of the NHRCK contravene South Korea's international commitments to protect LGBT people from discrimination and violence.

With these concerns in mind, we respectfully urge:

- The National Assembly to ensure that its premises are not used to host events by organizations that actively promote discrimination and scapegoating of minority groups.
- The President and National Assembly to ensure the full implementation of the National Human Rights Commission Act, including through denouncing conversion therapy as unscientific, unnecessary, and deeply damaging to lesbian, bisexual and gay people.
- The Ministry of Health to take immediate steps to publicly declare, in accordance with the current global medical standards (e.g., the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) that homosexuality is neither a disease nor an addiction, and that conversion therapy is harmful to lesbian, bisexual, and gay people.
- The appointment of an LGBT focal point to serve in the NHRCK and ask that the selection of this Commissioner must be done in consultation with LGBT groups.
- The NHRCK to issue an apology to the Korean LGBT community for allowing its premises to be used by groups known to promote prejudice and intolerance against LGBT Koreans.
- The NHRCK to implement the recommendations of the Asia Pacific Forum's Advisory Council of Jurists on how to incorporate sexual orientation and gender identity in the work of national human rights institutions. (For instance, these recommendations note that the NHRCK should collaborate with LGBT groups in South Korea and hold awareness programs that teach respect and acceptance of gender variance and diversity of sexual orientation.)

I can be reached at jstern@iglhrc.org, and Grace Poore, IGLHRC's Regional Program Coordinator for Asia can be reached at gpoore@iglhrc.org. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience on these priority matters. This letter is being shared with the Rainbow Action Against Sexual-Minority Discrimination.

Sincerely,



Jessica Lynn Stern
Executive Director

CC:

Mr. Seong-min Yoo
National Assembly Operating Committee Chairperson

Mr. Yong-gook Kim
Head of Communication and Cooperation Division, NHRCK

Ms. Pip Dargan
Deputy Director, Asia Pacific Forum Secretariat

Mr. Vladlen Stefanov
Chief, National Institutions and Regional Mechanisms Section
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Korean Neuro Psychiatric Association, Seoul, Korea

ⁱ *Christian Daily*, March 20, 2015, translated from Korean to English by Rainbow Action Against Sexual-Minority Discrimination of Korea.

ⁱⁱ “Therapies to Change Sexual Orientation Lack Medical Justification And Threaten Health.” May 17, 2012, http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6803&Itemid=1926 Also 2009 American Psychological Association report, <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://youtu.be/m6TDs42j5Qo>

^{iv} Open letter from ANNI Network of Forum-Asia that criticizes the appointment of Ee-woo Choi. <http://www.forum-asia.org/?p=18269>

^v In 2010, the Advisory Council of Jurists of the Asia Pacific Forum recommended 60 specific actions for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in Asia to help them incorporate LGBT rights into their work. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea is a member of the Asia Pacific Forum.