

41st Session of the Human Rights Council

General Debate , Item 3

July 1, 2019

Delivered by: Antonia Kruger-Ayebazibwe

Thank you, Mr. President,

My name is *Antonia Kruger-Ayebazibwe* and I am delivering this statement on behalf of multiple faith leaders, faith-based and non-faith-based organizations including ACT Alliance, Act Church of Sweden, Ana Ester Padua Freire, the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, CCI Network / Al-Ghurbaah Foundation, Davis Mac-Iyalla, Dede Oetomo, Franciscans International, GAYa NUSANTARA Foundation, the Global Faith and Justice Project, the Interfaith Diversity Network of West Africa, Ishmael Bahati Omumbwa, MCC Brazil, Michael Adee, Michael Brinkshroder, Muslims for Progressive Values, Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK) e.V, the Pacific Human Rights Initiative, Pema Kenya, The Queer Muslim Project, Rainbow Pride Foundation Fiji, Soulforce, and Tashi Choedup.

We welcome the work of the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, for the past 3 years. Since the Independent Expert was mandated through the Human Rights Council resolution 32/2, in 2016, considerable work has been done to overcome violence and discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, including in terms of reports presented, country visits, and meetings with civil society groups including faith leaders and faith-based communities. We very much welcome this outreach from the Independent Expert.

A general inclination, so far, from the global community has been to perceive religious and cultural traditions as distinct from and even opposed to the LGBTQI community. Further, fundamentalist and extremist religious communities have promoted this distinction and hatred, threatening civil society spaces and targeting LGBTIQ HR defenders. SOGI rights that protect LGBTQI persons from violence and discrimination have been unduly radicalized as a threat to freedom of religion, despite the diversity of attitudes and beliefs about LGBTQI persons in religions around the world. As a result, individuals believed to belong to the LGBTQI community are continuously being punished in the name of protecting the family, traditional values and religious beliefs.

Religious spaces are meant to offer refuge and protection for the discriminated and marginalized. For many LGBTQI people, religion remains a great source of emotional, psychological and spiritual support including in the face of overt violence and discrimination. Further, we must not forget that there is also a long history of the existence and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in different cultures and traditions and in various indigenous and religious communities. Today, some research indicates that many people of faith are accepting

of LGBTQI people¹. We need to deepen our understanding of faith-based tolerance and inclusiveness of LGBTQI people in different contexts around the world.

The continuous politicization of religion is fomenting hatred and discrimination against the community including here at the United Nations. Some faith-based groups, some with the support of their governments, are leveraging their resources to promote messages of hate and discrimination in the name of their faith and religion. The politicization of religion strengthen prejudice and stigma toward LGBTIQ people, resulted in acts of violence leading to murderer and or suicidal death.

LGBTQI individuals, as all human beings, are entitled to have their spiritual and cultural identity recognized and respected, and they should not be disadvantaged in their quest to belong to a family, a society, a culture and a religion. We, as faith based actors, call on the Human Rights Council to ensure the respect of the principle of non-discrimination and equality in law and in practice, including through the renewal of mandate of the UN SOGI Expert and its continued work and and we urge the Human Rights Council to continue supporting such vital efforts.

Let our differences be the reason we celebrate our unique diversities and not the cause to deny us rights.

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ "Minorities report 2017: attitudes to sexual and gender minorities around the world" The ILGA-RIWI Global Attitudes Survey on sexual, gender and sex minorities in partnership with Viacom, Logo and SAGE, October 2017 URL: <https://ilga.org/ilga-riwi-global-attitudes-survey>