



International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)

by Craig Kaczorowski

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The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) is a worldwide non-profit federation of local and national groups dedicated to achieving equal rights for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people and their liberation from all forms of legal, social, cultural, or economic discrimination.

Founded in 1978 in Coventry, England, the ILGA now has more than 350 member organizations, representing nearly 80 countries. Member organizations range from small collectives to national groups. Their world headquarters is located in Belgium.

Protesting Discrimination

The ILGA focuses public and government attention on cases of discrimination by supporting programs and protest actions, asserting diplomatic pressure, disseminating information, and working with international organizations and the international media.

Many of ILGA's campaigns have helped to win major anti-discrimination victories. Pressure from the ILGA contributed to the legalization of homosexual acts in New Zealand, Russia, and Ireland, among other countries. The ILGA has also highlighted the oppression of sexual minorities in nations such as Iran, where it is dangerous for any organized movement to form.

A committee on AIDS was established within ILGA in 1992 in order to coordinate global action on AIDS-related issues. Since then, members have met with the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF.

Supporting Autonomous Lesbian and Gay Groups

The ILGA has supported the emergence of the first autonomous lesbian and gay groups in several countries. In Latin America and Asia, for example, ILGA has given the impetus and support to glbtq groups, and has contributed to the growth of a democratic multi-racial lesbian and gay movement in South Africa.

The ILGA also played a crucial role in the development of the first gay and lesbian organizations in the former Eastern bloc countries, beginning in the early 1980s when many of the groups had to operate clandestinely. From 1987 to 1996, ILGA helped organize ten sub-regional conferences in Eastern Europe to allow the participation of people who could not travel to conferences in the West and to address the problems and needs specific to this part of Europe.

Lobbying International Organizations

The ILGA lobbies international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and the European Union. ILGA has participated in many of the United Nations' human rights activities, including the Second U. N. World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, and the 1995 U. N. World Conference on Women held in Beijing.

Additionally, ILGA's representatives have regularly presented evidence on human rights violations to the annual hearings in Geneva of the U.N.'s Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

ILGA Pink Books

The ILGA began publishing its Pink Books in 1985, updating them in 1988 and then again in 1993. The Pink Books highlight the legal, social, and political status of the international lesbian and gay movement and include articles from around the world. Another section of the Pink Books is dedicated to country-by-country surveys that describe the most recent information available on the legal and social status of lesbians and gay men.

The series of Pink Books have provided the most comprehensive and wide-ranging accounts of the international glbtq movement and have become valuable information resources to both activists and scholars. The Pink Books can be found in most North American and Western European public or university libraries.

The World Legal Survey

Building on the pioneering work begun with the Pink Books, the ILGA has recently released the World Legal Survey. This country-by-country survey covers important legal areas of concern to glbtq people--sexual offences law, freedom of association and expression, anti-discrimination legislation, employment protection, partnership, parenting, and the human rights aspects of HIV/AIDS.

Also included are sections covering police harassment, street violence, and assaults on glbtq activists. The World Legal Survey is available electronically from the official ILGA Internet site.

United Nations Recognition and Rejection

In 1993, ILGA became the first glbtq group to be granted the status of a nongovernmental organization with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Nongovernmental organizations act as consultants on various matters and are allowed to attend U.N. meetings and informal negotiating sessions that are closed to the public and press.

However, conservative groups in the United States alleged that some ILGA member groups--such as the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA)--promoted pedophilia. These conservative groups complained to Congress that by accrediting the ILGA the United Nations was tacitly supporting pedophilia.

In January 1994, the United States Senate voted unanimously to withhold \$129 million from United States payments to the United Nations if ILGA continued to be accredited. Faced with this threat, U.N. members were forced to withdraw consultative status to the organization in 1995.

ILGA reapplied for consultative status with the United Nations in 2000, pledging to rid its membership of pedophile groups. After an often contentious debate that lasted intermittently for two years, the U.N. Committee on Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) rejected the ILGA's bid to regain consultative status in February 2002.

In the final committee decision, the countries voting to reject ILGA were Russia, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, China, Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Pakistan. Sudan was not convinced that ILGA fully opposed pedophilia, while Senegal and Pakistan stated that it was unlikely that they would support any homosexual groups at the United Nations.

The countries voting in favor of ILGA's application were the United States, Romania, Bolivia, Chile, France, and Germany. The United States delegate argued that he saw no evidence that ILGA continued to condone pedophilia and that ILGA had been helpful in the worldwide fight against HIV and AIDS.

In May, 2002, the vote on ILGA's status went before the entire U.N. Economic and Social Council. The Council voted to uphold the committee's rejection of ILGA as a nongovernmental organization on the grounds that the group had not documented that it had purged pedophile organizations from its member groups.

Kursad Kahramanoglu, the ILGA's co-secretary-general, stated that his group had refused to divulge its member affiliates because of homophobia around the world. "One of ILGA's aims is to help these people, not to jeopardize their security. We have not been able to beat homophobia around the world," he stated.

The Council's vote prevents ILGA from reapplying to the U.N. until 2005.

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About the Author

Craig Kaczorowski writes extensively on media, culture, and the arts. He holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, with a focus on contemporary critical theory, from the University of Chicago. He comments on national media trends for two newspaper industry magazines.