

editorial

Over the past nine years, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia has served as a key moment for mobilisation in over 120 countries. This year, several new countries have joined this long list, with activities reported for the first time in Ghana, Jordan, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Suriname, Tunisia and Madagascar, confirming May 17 as the biggest annual landmark for mobilisation in favour of sexual and gender diversities.

Despite opposition from states, and political and religious leaders, in countries such as Georgia, Russia or China (leading to the cancellation of some events), the global celebrations mostly happened peacefully.

Actions were organised in 35 countries where same-sex acts are punished by law, demonstrating the amazing determination of sexual and gender minorities and their allies who stood up and spoke out for the universality of human rights.

81 countries still criminalise homosexuality to this date. This represents 40% of the global population. In almost no country can transgender people freely express their gender identity, even though gender expression constitutes one of the most fundamental aspects of our humanity.

Furthermore, almost 70% of the world population have their right to expression and information on matters related to sexual and gender diversities severely violated by states. And even where legislation is not repressive, social stigma and discrimination, fuelled by stereotypes, act daily to silence minorities.

The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia acted this year as a strong catalyst for worldwide mobilisations to defend the right to freedom of expression and information, with dozens of events on this theme organised worldwide.

Once again, global opinion leaders and politicians lent their voices to the cause. Several heads of states issued strong declarations. The United Nations was particularly vocal this year, with statements from the Secretary General and the heads of most major UN agencies. A special video from the UN-led 'Free and Equal' campaign, and a special declaration by UN experts and mandate holders on freedom of expression also marked the Day. Celebrities also used their clout to contribute to the global 'noise' around the Day – from Sean Penn attending an event in Haiti, to Star Trek's George Takei mobilising over one million people on his fan page, among others.

Companies also increasingly invested May 17 as a moment for internal or external messaging. A special mention goes to Barclays Bank in the UK, which set up a specific 'International Day Against Homophobia' screen on their 3,400 cash machines during 10 days, reaching millions of people.

Many more impressive initiatives lightened up the Day around the world. This report provides just a glimpse of them. And all the May 17 mobilisations represent themselves just a glimpse of the courage and creativity, which LGBTI activists and their allies demonstrate all year round.

And despite difficulties and setbacks, their struggles and sacrifices are rewarded with success, as even in the most difficult contexts, we see positive changes emerging.

This report is a tribute to this incredible energy of all those committed to making tomorrow's world a better, fairer and gentler place for all, where everyone would be allowed to express their sexual orientation and gender identity freely.

Tamara Adrian
Chair
IDAHO Committee

2014 GLOBAL FOCUS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon

Throughout the world, activists chose this year's focus issue to be Freedom of Expression. Countless initiatives took place worldwide, to highlight how the fundamental right to freely discuss issues around sexual and gender rights is systematically being violated by the great majority of states. The mobilisation included a 'Global Call to Leaders of the World to protect LGBTI Free Expression' developed in association between the IFEX network, Article 19 and the IDAHO Committee, and with the support of Amnesty International. This was signed by 170 organisations globally and supported by a Thunderclap campaign, which reached 1.5 million people online.

The call to mobilise on the issue of Freedom of Expression was also heard at the highest international levels. UN human rights experts, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, issued a joint statement which underlines how 'Free expression and association is key to eliminating Homophobia and Transphobia'.

The UN-led 'Free and Equal' campaign also weighed in with a special video initiative on this issue. They developed, in association with the IDAHO Committee, a special 'World Map' of historical references of sexual and gender diversities, aiming to debunk the myth that these are 'Western' features.

Around the world, many activists joined the call by organising conferences, debates, and seminars on LGBTI freedom of expression – from London, to Nairobi, to Jakarta, to Rio de Janeiro. Countless demonstrations were organised with free expression at their core – including dance flashmobs, sing-ins, kiss-ins, body and face painting, street art, photography and arts festivals. Even in the most hostile contexts, many activists made the choice to take to the streets to defend LGBTI rights, and to highlight the silencing of communities in the public sphere.

FIGHTING TRANSPHOBIA WORLDWIDE



Transantacruzan Parade:
Commemoration of the Day
held by transgender activists in the Philippines

Once again, this year's IDAHOT provided a strategic moment for trans activists to mobilise at all levels, to campaign on local issues, and to spotlight and challenge transphobia, including within LGBTI movement spaces. Dozens of events focused specifically on fighting transphobia took place globally, in all world regions. Actions driven by trans communities, and supported by trans allies, were at the very forefront of national mobilisations in various countries including Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Hungary, Bolivia and Pakistan.

Importantly, various top global figures, international agencies and leading organisations in the field of gender, sexual and human rights, took significant steps to include Transphobia in official pronouncements on the Day. As in previous years, Transgender Europe (TGEU), and the Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide (TvT) research project published an IDAHOT edition of the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) Reports, which document levels of transphobic hate crimes worldwide.

IDAHO 2014 EUROPEAN FORUM



Helena Dalli, Maltese Minister for Social Dialogue, and Erik Ullenhag, Swedish Minister for Integration, opening the Forum

The 2nd European IDAHO Forum, a major two-day international conference, brought together political representatives, LGBTI and human rights organisations, community activists and media in Valletta, Malta. Co-hosted by the governments of Malta and Sweden, the Forum brought together top national level politicians, including the Prime Minister of Malta. Many civil society organisations participated, including ILGA-Europe, TGEU, and ORAM. Key international institutions and agencies were also represented, including UNESCO, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the Council of Europe, the Intergroup on LGBT Rights of the European Parliament, and the European Commission.

INTERFAITH MOBILIZATION



Italian LGBTI Christian group, Gionata, calling for global prayer to mark the Day

Once again, the IDAHOT 'Global Interfaith Prayer Initiative', organised by Italy's Gionata group and the European Forum of LGBT Christians, not only saw faith-based actions for May 17 in 14 Italian towns and cities, but internationally. Events of prayer, reflection and remembrance were also held as part of this initiative in Spain, Portugal, Malta, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

GLOBAL SING-IN



The L Project releasing 'We're All Human,' the soundtrack for IDAHOT 2014



Communities in Seoul, South Korea, dancing for 'Speak Up and Act Up' for IDAHOT 2014



Beijing Queer Chorus performing IDAHOT Concert to mark the Day

The soundtrack to the movement was made, when community choirs and musicians came together from 10 different countries to join the chorus for LGBTI equality worldwide for IDAHOT 2014. The United Kingdom was particularly vocal, with the official IDAHOT theme tune provided by the L Project's 'We're All Human', breaking into the UK Independent sales chart in the week around May 17. Argentinian pop star, Jordana Battaglia, also recorded a song for the rights of LGBTI people, released especially for IDAHOT. Community choirs performed live on the Day in places as diverse as Australia, South Korea and Croatia.



Sub-saharan Africa



African Lesbians and Feminists mobilising for IDAHOT 2014

Despite significant security concerns and heightened repression of LGBTI communities in many parts of the region, communities in at least 19 countries still managed to come together for a wide range of public and private actions around May 17, 2014. Actions were registered in Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Activists in several countries reported they were particularly cautious this year in organising and announcing their actions, given recent crackdowns on LGBTI freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

In many countries the mobilisations around the Day were stronger than ever. A coalition of more than ten groups came together in Kenya for two weeks of events around the IDAHOT 2014. In South Africa, a wide range of events were held in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

In several countries the Day provided an entry point for encouraging discussion around sexual rights, with religious and political leaders, and on the part of the general public. In Mozambique, LGBTI groups secured a national television debate, on the negative aspects of discrimination against sexual minorities. In Cameroon, religious and political leaders came together with local communities to discuss homosexuality. In Zimbabwe, communities gathered at the Dutch embassy in the capital Harare, where Richman Rangwani, a leading councillor with the country's ruling Zanu-PF party, spoke out in defence of LGBTI rights. Sudan hosted an event in the Nile Valley on education and the effects of homophobia on the lives of Sudanese LGBTI people.

In many other countries the Day was an opportunity to organise cultural, academic and arts-based events. In Nigeria civil society organisations released a new documentary, challenging the 'Veil of Silence' around abuses of LGBTI communities in the country, as well as a research report on rising violence against sexual and gender minorities, since the passing of Nigeria's Anti-LGBTI law in January 2014. An arts festival, exhibition and street parade were held in the island of Mauritius, whilst in Botswana, communities came together for a queer theatre festival, a candlelit vigil, street march, and storytelling and music event. For the first time ever, May 17 was commemorated in Ghana and Madagascar.

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights co-signed the joint May 17th UN statement 'Free expression and association key to eliminating Homophobia and Transphobia'.



The Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans, and North Africa



A visual of 2014 IDAHOT's "Freedom of Expression" Campaign featured in Turkish's "Cark" magazine



The poster of "Everyone is Different" Campaign that marked the Day in Egypt



Silent protest in Georgia to stand against intimidation



In Azerbaijan, activists underline that same-sex love is old as the nation itself

May 17 was marked with milestone events in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Serbia, Tunisia and Turkey.

On the eve of Presidential elections, Egyptian activists held a week of actions which included sports games, theatre, workshops on transphobia, an online campaign, and the launch of an online magazine on sexual health. In partnership with women's organizations, the first LBT organization in Tunisia held an event focused on creating space for LBT women's self-expression and community-building. Organizers viewed this event as a milestone in the emergence of a new movement. A pioneering event in Jordan took place in cooperation with 'MyKali Magazine', the country's only magazine which addresses gender and sexual minorities. Communities came together for a panel discussion on homophobia in Jordan, whilst MyKali dedicated its latest edition to Freedom of Expression of LGBTI people. In Israel, universities and youth movements were particularly vocal around the Day, with events held around the country. In Palestine women's groups held a study day for school counsellors, to raise awareness about sexual orientation and gender identities.

In Georgia, the Orthodox Church called for a counter demonstration to the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, and attempted to reclaim May 17 as 'National Family Day', getting a 4,000 strong crowd to demonstrate. Despite this show of hostility, LGBTI activists marked IDAHOT with a flashmob on May 18: more than 100 shoes were placed on Tbilisi's Pushkin Square, as a 'Protest on Behalf of the Invisible & Against Invisibility'. In Armenia activists took action despite widespread intimidation. An inspiring set of actions also came this year from Azerbaijan, where local communities campaigned internationally around the theme 'Hate Kills', and held various symbolically powerful events such as a demonstration in one of the oldest inhabited parts of the country, Gobustan, under the theme 'We were here, we are here, we will be here'.

A network of LGBTI organisations from these regions released its 2nd Annual IDAHOT Memorandum. It put emphasis on five different areas this year, key to LGBTI people in these regions: legal changes, freedom of expression, health, education and employment.



Europe



Activists in Ukraine marked the Day by throwing a flashmob



Brussels Pride: annually held on the Saturday closest to IDAHOT



"Stop Homophobia!" sign held by a Russian activist



Activists in Albania marked the Day by holding a bike rally

Once again, actions were held in the vast majority of European countries. Various institutions and agencies of the European Union took actions for IDAHOT 2014, including the European Commission, EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the Council of Europe.

Particularly strong mobilisations were registered in the United Kingdom, where events were held in more than 25 towns and cities. UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, also issued a formal statement in support for May 17. In Germany, actions took place for IDAHOT 2014 in an unprecedented 24 cities. Over a thousand people came together for a May 17 demonstration in Berlin, under the banner 'When Did You Decide to Be Straight?'. France and Italy also registered new levels of mobilisation this year, with actions held in more than a dozen towns and cities in each country. Russia, of course, was the focus of much media attention in the lead up to and on the Day. Activists stood strong in the face of new legal instruments limiting the expression of homosexual 'propaganda', and widespread violence and intimidation against LGBTI communities. 'Rainbow flashmob' balloon releases were held in 16 cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. For the first time since the federal 'propaganda' law was passed, in 2013, permits to hold public actions were granted by the authorities in at least two cities. Nevertheless, violence and arrests also marked the Day with 15 people arrested and two events attacked by neo-nazi groups. Fortunately, no serious injuries were incurred this year.

Meanwhile, a wonderful moment of hope and celebration was accomplished, and captured on video, by a small group of activists in Ukraine, who joined the global action with a flashmob event on May 18. This action took place despite widespread threats and intimidation against LGBTI communities, in a context in which LGBTI rights have increasingly been used in the past months to manipulate and distort calls for broad human rights protections, as part of a 'Western' led agenda.

In other highlights, Albanian activists and allies braved stormy conditions to come together, for their 2nd Annual Gay Bike (P)Ride through the streets of the capital, Tirana, where a pride march also took place. In nine cities in Ireland, LGBTI people and communities of faith came together in churches for services of prayer, worship and remembrance. The Northern part of Cyprus hosted its first pride march, coming soon after the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the country. Until this legal change, in early 2014, this was the last place in Europe in which same sex relationships were still outlawed.



Asia



IDAHOT Candlelight Vigil held by activists in Thailand



Trans supermodel, Geena Rocero, spoke at Hong Kong's IDAHOT Vigil



Singaporean activists marked the Day by flying Rainbow Kites



Activists in Taipei erected 100 paper gravestones with the names of homophobic and transphobic attacks' victims in front of the Presidential Office Building

The Day was marked in at least 21 countries in Asia. This year, the commemoration of the Day saw particular increases in mobilisations in Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Japan.

Events in the region were really diverse, ranging from rainbow chalk events, to public marches, to faith-based actions and discussions, to candlelight vigils and countless more forms of creative protests. In many cases, mobilisation extended out into a whole week of events around May 17. Actions covered key focuses such as school bullying, transgender rights, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and freedom of expression. Many events involved key stakeholders such as United Nation agencies, local authorities, and public figures, such as supermodel Geena Rocero, who attended IDAHOT celebrations in both Hong Kong and the Philippines. In the case of Indonesia and Japan, events included public lectures, film screenings and some other events with a key focus on promoting LGBTI equality. In these two countries, May 17 was marked in at least 17 and 11 cities, respectively.

In China, despite some restrictions more than 90% of planned events around the country were successfully carried out, which amounted to a total of more than a hundred events. Taiwanese activists marked the Day by conducting a protest to pressure Taiwan's government to approve a bill legalising same sex marriage – a project which has been stalled since October 2013. Activists in Myanmar organised a participatory photo exhibition, under the banner of debunking Burmese misconceptions on the links between sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV/AIDS.

Activists in Mongolia used the Day to launch an ongoing initiative to encourage the production of LGBTI-themed artistic works, amongst many other initiatives. Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam also saw multiple events organised around the Day, and in Kyrgyzstan various events were organised throughout the week around May 17. For the first time ever May 17 was marked publicly in Pakistan. IDAHOT events were held across five major cities in the country (Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Larkana, and Hyderabad) involving a total of over 400 participants.



Latin America and the Caribbean



From upper right (clockwise): (a) Activists in Paraguay marking the Day by holding a kiss-in; (b) Chilean activists holding an IDAHOT march; (c) Costa Rican President raising a rainbow flag to commemorate the Day

May 17, 2014 was marked by hundreds of events in at least 27 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including 19 of the 20 countries of mainland Central and South America.

Brazil saw at least 150 events in all major cities, including a whole month of events in the North-Eastern state of Bahia. Argentina saw a mass kiss-in in front of Buenos Aires' Catholic Cathedral, and the presentation of two new LGBTI rights bills, to be approved by the National Congress. Tens of thousands of people came together for a massive street parade on May 17 in Santiago, Chile. A member of the Peruvian Congress came out on May 17, becoming the first openly gay national politician in the country. Events in Bolivia were focused on respect for trans communities, whilst a cultural festival – sponsored by government agencies – put the LGBTI agenda in the spotlight. Various events took place in Paraguay, Uruguay, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela.

For the first time ever, Suriname saw public actions for May 17, whilst in Guyana, a Cinema Festival was held. Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, tweeted in honour of the Day and, for the first time in Mexican History, May 17 was explicitly recognised as the official national day against homophobia. A huge wave of mobilisation was registered this year in Nicaragua, with actions in five cities. Various events also took place in Panama, El Salvador and Honduras.

IDAHOT in Cuba was marked by a whole month of events, including a massive public celebration, led out once again by Mariela Castro. Various organizations joined forces to organise events around May 17 in downtown Port of Spain and Belmont in Trinidad & Tobago. Jamaica was host to a symposium on the topic of sexual citizenship and religion in the run up to May 17. The President of Costa Rica raised the rainbow flag outside the Presidential house on Friday, May 16, for the first time ever. Belize's First Lady, Kim Simplis Barrow, released an emotional video address for May 17, affirming her personal and political opposition to LGBTI hate crimes. In Haiti, activists held an event in the US embassy which included a film screening, and the support of US actor Sean Penn – well-known for his activism and leadership in relief efforts in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake.



North America



"As we commemorate the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, we recommit ourselves to the fundamental belief that all people should be treated equally, that they should have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, and that no one should face violence or discrimination — no matter who they are or whom they love."

US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
May 16, 2014



Speak Up & Speak Out IDAHOT Rally in Halifax, Nova Scotia



'Kiss the Pride' campaign at IDAHOT celebrations in Omaha, Nebraska

In Canada, 85 organisations backed a special May 17 call on the government to affirm its support for LGBTI rights, and submitted a 10 point plan for dealing with human rights abuses of LGBTI people around the world. Foreign Affairs Minister, John Baird, responded with an official statement underscoring the strong commitment of the Canadian government to continue to press for universal human rights. National television station, CBC, covered these initiatives, as well as the raising of the rainbow flag at Toronto City Hall to mark the Day. Meanwhile, in Vancouver, many activists and allies came together for a day of events focused on LGBTI refugees and on elderly LGBTI communities. Throughout the province of Quebec, mobilisations were traditionally strong and diverse.

In the United States, President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and Vice-President Joe Biden released statements and tweets of support for the worldwide May 17 mobilisations this year. The US House of Representatives also introduced legislation into the House officially honouring the Day. A nationwide initiative to demand full and equal non-discrimination protections for LGBTI communities, co-ordinated a 'Day of Organising', with some activity taken around May 17 in 30 states. Particularly strong mobilisations were registered this year in Atlanta in the state of Georgia, Omaha in Nebraska, Boise in Idaho, and New Orleans in Louisiana, with street marches, exhibitions, online campaigns and many other events stretching out around the Day.

A major US-based international anti-bullying campaign launched a significant series of campaigns and messages of support on May 17, and mobilised and supported its local affiliates in various countries to take action for IDAHOT. Many other LGBTI rights NGOs and campaigns working nationwide marked the Day with statements of support, online campaigns, news articles or other initiatives.



Australia and Oceania



Australia's Brisbane City Council marking the Day by lighting a rainbow bridge

Dozens of events marked the Day in Australia, in at least 12 towns and cities. Many hundreds of people participated in Melbourne's Equal Love Rally on May 17. Local activist groups in Sydney initiated a major participatory art project & exhibition, based around translations of the word 'love' in different languages. Education groups launched the 'Oi!' campaign to challenge homophobia in rural areas, whilst up and down the country – from Whindam City to Blue Mountains – LGBTI communities, sports teams, schools and local authorities flew the rainbow flag for May 17.

Meanwhile, in New Zealand, 'Big Gay Picnic' events were organised across the country, in Wellington, Dunedin, Rotorua, Hamilton and Auckland, to celebrate love, equality and acceptance. Other highlights included the 'I Stand With You' art project, at MIT University in Otara, South Auckland, which featured posters for LGBTQI rights, designed by various artists.

This year's IDAHOT was marked by a big wave of mobilisation in the South Pacific island of Fiji – where all events keyed into the 2014 focus on Freedom of Expression. FEMLink Pacific, a grass roots women's radio station had a day of broadcasts around the day, featuring the participation of 30 rural women's leaders, amongst many other highlights. In Suva, various groups came together for a 'Family Fun Day Out', involving activities for children, games, music, creative expressions, and a candle light vigil, followed by an after party. In Papua New Guinea, the IDAHOT was marked publicly for the first time ever, with a major participatory online campaign 'We Are PNG', involving contributions from around the country.

