

# International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT)

15 mai 2015, Alliance Française of Johannesburg

Honourable guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and an immense pleasure to welcome you at the Alliance Française of Johannesburg tonight as we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

I'm particularly delighted that the Embassy of France, the Alliance Française of Johannesburg and GALA have joined forces for the second time to mark this important event.

On the occasion of IDAHOT Day, I wish to reaffirm France's commitment to the principle of the universality of Human rights, to equality and non-discrimination. France has made human rights – and notably the fight against human rights violations on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity - one of the priorities of its foreign policy. At the United Nations and together with its European partners, France works towards the universal decriminalisation of homosexuality and actively engages both within international fora and in the field.

In South Africa, France supports grassroot LGBTI organisations through the *Civil Society Development Fund*, run by the Embassy in Pretoria. It has provided funding to 20 NGOs in the last 4 years, one of them being GALA and its *Asiphephe project*.

In the last decades, there has been great progress both globally and locally in the protection of LGBTI persons' rights: in 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted the first UN resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity that paved the way for a UN report on the issue. Last year, another resolution was passed with an increased support base from all regions, calling for a second UN report on human rights violations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

Despite significant advances, many challenges remain to be addressed, three of which are particularly important at a global level:

- Firstly, the criminalization of homosexuality: 76 countries continue to outlaw same sex relationships, with penalties ranging from jail sentences to death penalty.
- Secondly, hate crimes, which continue to be perpetrated in all regions of the world, ranging from bullying to physical assault, torture and murder.
- Thirdly, the prevalence of discriminatory practices against LGBTI people, often aggravated by the lack of protection by national laws.

South Africa has been at the forefront of the fight against LGBTI discrimination since 1996, when it became the first country in the world to protect sexual orientation as a human right in its Constitution. Since then, it has outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation in the workplace, and legalized same-sex marriages. Nevertheless, LGBTI people continue to face discrimination and extreme violence on a daily basis. We know of cases where perpetrators are not caught, not prosecuted and not punished.

In France, LGBTI equality also remains an issue: same-sex marriage was legalized only in 2013, making France the 14<sup>th</sup> (of now 18) countries recognizing it worldwide. It has become increasingly common with about 10.000 marriages celebrated last year. However, a high level of homophobia persists within the French society: in its 2015 report, just released this week, the French association *SOS Homophobie* reveals that testimonies about homophobic acts rose by 41% since 2011, the year that preceded the public debates about same-sex marriage.

Combating discrimination in all areas of social and economic life takes concrete legislative measures. It also goes through education and through promoting a culture of equality that is required to allow all LGBTI people to live their lives in dignity and with respect.

Tonight's event will focus on addressing the discrimination against LGBTI persons at the workplace - an issue that has emerged as a key concern among national and global labour organisations in recent years.

In South Africa, LGBTI workers often face difficulties to access information on laws and policies that protect them against discrimination in the labour market and at the workplace.

I am thus very excited to attend the launch of two landmark publications addressing these pressing issues – *Equality is Everyone's Business* and *Are Our Workplaces Safe and Supportive?* that were coproduced by GALA, the Labour Research Service and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission - and I'm looking forward to a lively and informative panel discussion.

Before ending, I would like to mention that the Alliance Française of Pretoria, together with OUT Wellbeing, is organising an IDAHOT event this coming Sunday from 3pm. This event will focus on migrant LGBTI and include an exhibition, a concert and a debate.

Let me wish you all an interesting evening, fruitful debates and encourage you to continue advocating for the rights of LGBTI people in South Africa and in the world.