

38th session of the Human Rights Council

20 June 2018

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences

Statement by The International Lesbian and Gay Association joined by, Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit - COC Nederland

Delivered by: Leila Lohman

This Statement has been drafted in consultation with members of the European Lesbian* Conference based in different parts of Europe. We use the term 'lesbian' with an asterisk to encourage a broad range of people to join us – our goal is to promote the use of the term 'lesbian' as there still remains a large political and cultural struggle for lesbian* visibility, empowerment and representation.

We concur with the Special Rapporteur on violence against Women in saying that the Internet and new technologies can bring about benefits and carry immense empowering & solidarity potential; This is especially the case for social groups, which historically have faced limited opportunities to assemble, share information or both.

At the same time, we are concerned about the potential misuse of the Internet & new technologies, and the consequences thereof for lesbians*. Even more so in countries where legal prohibition of same sex relations exists or where deeply rooted stigma prevails, or both.

According to our personal experiences as human rights defenders & cyber-activists with sometimes multiple marginalized intersecting identities including being lesbian*, digital space has become an additional platform for perpetrators or 'trolls' to unleash their violence, harassment or bullying against us. In some cases, their acts have resulted in forms of censorship, invasion of privacy, online stalking, and even rape or death threats. Furthermore, cases have been reported where online violence has led to actual physical violence.

In fact, because it is easier for perpetrators to attack in digital space anonymously, these acts can be particularly vicious and harmful. In the worse cases, such attacks can lead to victims suffering from serious mental health issues and/or committing physical (self)-harm.

For these reasons, we strongly welcome the inclusion, on several occasions, of SOGIE and lesbians* in the Special Rapporteur's report on 'Online violence against Women'.

Underscoring the particular forms of vulnerability for lesbians* is key to us. For example, in an age where information can 'go viral', lesbians* are particularly vulnerable to non-consensual 'outing' online. In Russia, for example, Anti-LGBTI groups recently collected information about teachers through their social media accounts to create "dossiers" to send to school administrations and local education authorities asking them to fire the suspiciously non-heterosexual teachers they identified.

For all reasons outlined above, we recognize, commend and encourage the various avenues and recommendations outlined by the Special Rapporteur on violence against Women and would like to ask her the following questions:

- What next steps are planned in conjunction with other mandate holders, Treaty Bodies and UN Women & ITU to work on promoting and implementing progressive changes in cyberspace policy that would result in significant reforms and creating inclusive and safe environments of equal opportunities and empowerment for lesbians*?
- How does the Special Rapporteur on violence against women intend to facilitate or encourage the conduct of regular and large scale collection of data on cyber violence disaggregated by sex taking into account intersectional discrimination, particularly lesbian* experiences, as well as & public campaigns to end lesbophobia in cyberspace?