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COC Netherlands, Amulet, Labrys, ILGA-Europe intervention
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The Role of education to promote mutual understanding and respect for diversity

Documentation on the extent of persistence of homophobia such as the annual ODIHR Hate Crimes report and the 2008 report on homophobia by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency clearly show that action is needed to combat hate crimes targeted at LGBT people. Following an increasing weight of evidence and building on existing OSCE commitments we strongly call for increased attention and action.

Former High-Commissioner for Human Rights to the United Nations (Louis Arbour) said in 2006 “that violence against LGBT people ultimately goes unpunished” and that “this shameful silence is the ultimate rejection of the fundamental principle of universality of rights”.

Discrimination of LGBT young people unfortunately is still commonplace in educational institutions . Schools indisputably take a major role in shaping the lives of young people, including the lives of LGBT young people. Various independent pieces of research have demonstrated that schools for LGBT young people are a less safe space; young people that experience discrimination and bullying are more likely to face mental health risks, have decreased self-esteem and thus drop out of schools. Last week a research was published in the Netherlands, which found that LGBT youth is up to five times more likely to commit suicide compared than their heterosexual peers. Detailed research has shown that this hostile social environment causes many of them to turn to suicide as an escape from depression, isolation and hopelessness. Where governments and educational authorities take specific measures to address the hostile social environment faced by LGBT youth, significant improvements can be achieved. It is only by taking measures that these young people get the chance to realize their full potential, practise active citizenship and contribute to the development of society. Only then can a truly diverse society can be established.

We remind partner States that Human Rights are Universal and apply to all human beings equally. To place Human Rights in a hierarchy is in itself discrimination. Therefore we call upon partner States to recognize principles on the application of international Human Rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity as laid down in the Yogyakarta Principles. These principles affirm binding international legal standards with which all States must comply.

We recommend that OSCE, its partner States and ODIHR:

- Have unbiased information on sexual diversity included in the curriculum of its educational system.
- Establish the safeguards that will turn its educational system into a place where people are not excluded for sexual orientation or gender identity but a safe place where mutual understanding and respect are adhered to.
- To implement and support awareness raising programs targeting the general public, with the purpose of overcoming prejudices which are the basis of hate-motivated crimes;

Thank you.