

# WATCHDOG



## youth coalition

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*The Pink Triangle- Forgotten History*  
Praveen Kumar Tankala  
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## IDAHOT Watchdog 2015

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) is an annual international day of awareness and action against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia, celebrated on May 17th. The Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR) publishes its newsletter, the Watchdog, each year on IDAHOT. First produced at the Youth Forum in the Hague in 1999, we distribute The Watchdog at most international conferences and events we attend as part of the YCSRR's advocacy and public education activities.

The theme of this year's IDAHOT Watchdog is *Freedom of Expression*. Entirely youth authored, this edition includes articles, poems, artwork and photographs from LGBTQI young people from Asia, Europe, Central America and the Caribbean. The IDAHOT Watchdog is a forum where young people from around the world can share their experiences of being part of the LGBTQI community- both as a celebration and as a call to action against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia. The voices of LGBTQI communities are often silenced and erased; The Watchdog is one small part of creating space for LGBTQI people to speak about their lives and experiences.

IDAHOT is a time for celebration, but also a time to remember that the price of freedom of expression for many can be very high, and can even include death. We want to remember and show solidarity with the many people who face violence and persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or for daring to speak their truth.

This year we would especially like to pay tribute to Pakistani feminist human rights activist Sabeen Mahmud who was murdered on 24th April, 2015 for speaking out. We hope you enjoy this year's range of submissions from young writers, activists, artists, photographers and filmmakers, all fighting to exercise their freedom of expression.

Happy reading!

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

# My Life In Color

**Jermaine Arnold**  
23 | Belize

Being a typical millennial, I spend a lot of my time on the internet making friends, posting status updates, tumbling and leaving my mark on pretty much all social media sites. Ironically, I can only be my real self in the virtual world, and this is because I am a homosexual living in a very homophobic country. I can as the phrase goes, let my freak flag fly.

With most English speaking internet users being predominantly “westerners,” I meet a lot of people from countries with a more accepting view of homosexuality. The question I am asked most often is: How do you feel being gay and living where you live? My answer is always the same: Most of the time I feel like I’m living a perpetual masquerade, with my mask glued to my face. This is how it feels being a closeted homosexual in an extremely homophobic country.

When I was younger, my life was not easy. I struggled with measuring up as the “perfect son” my dad and family expected at home, and I struggled in school to measure up to my peers’ and society’s definition of masculinity. I was teased mercilessly and even contemplated suicide on a few occasions. My only solace was books and music, and as a result I graduated at the top of both my elementary, and high school’s graduating class.

I have been insulted and threatened by people I know and don’t know. I’m usually unaffected by these incidences. However, a few of them stick. One incident in particular that stuck with me was when I was walking on the sidewalk one day, and a man blocked my path. He then started yelling all sorts of derogatory names and phrases, and topped that off by saying that I was not worthy of walking on the same sidewalk as him. At this point, I could taste my heart in my throat and I froze. I didn’t know what to do. I was rescued by a passerby, who also happened to be a man. He told the other man that he should be careful of what he was saying and then he walked with me to my house. It is little rays of light like this that got me through those dark times.

My life changed during my tertiary level of education. I found people like me and made real friends. I didn’t realize how alone or how much I didn’t know about myself before this. Being surrounded by people like me - people who I can relate to and who can relate to me is one of the most cathartic experiences I’ve had. I expected my life to be a bleak blur of grey, but now



**Stills from "I Like Italy But Italy Doesn't Like Me"**  
**Roberta Orlando**  
27 | Italy

*"Italy seen through my eyes: country of culture and deep traditions. Since all of us wear a mask, we will be recognised and celebrated for that. But when someone takes off the mask, time and again, his/her own identity means nothing. This video is a thought on identity which is not heard enough, especially for homosexuals."*

Visit our website to see the whole video. You can visit Roberta's website at [r0inconnu.blogspot.com](http://r0inconnu.blogspot.com)

it is a kaleidoscope of color, love and hope, tarnished by only a few blotches of grey. The people that I’ve met and the experiences that I’ve had since my years at college are what I use to define myself. I haven’t forgotten all of the other experiences that I’ve had, but I refuse to be defined by them.

My point in writing this is that I want people like me to know that there is always a silver lining, and it does get better in this “danse macabre” we call life. I want to give people hope and a reason to keep going. As one of my favorite poems by an anonymous WWI soldier, etched on the walls of a tunnel under the River Somme, succinctly puts it:

*"If in this place you are detained  
Don't look around you all in vain  
But cast your net and you shall find  
That every cloud is silver lined. Still."*

# “This world cannot handle my true colors”: Challenges faced by LGBTQ youth across Central and Eastern Europe & the Balkans

Małgorzata Kot, ASTRA Youth  
27 | Poland

“This world is not for me, this world cannot handle my true colors. Goodbye”. These were the last words of Isa Shakhmarli, Azerbaijani LGBT activist (20 years old) who committed suicide due to being discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation<sup>1</sup>. Eylül Cansın, a 23-year-old transgender Turkish girl took her own life in early January 2015, leaving a suicide note sharing her traumatic experience of transphobia: “[People] They impeded with me many times; they made me suffer a lot”<sup>2</sup>. Isa and Eylül’s stories are two among many describing the tragic consequences of homophobia and transphobia, many of which are hidden, surrounded with silence and taboo, taking place daily at schools, homes and reinforced through homophobic and transphobic laws.



Praveen Kumar Tankala

21 | India

*We Should All Be Feminist*-Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie #Feminism  
#WomensRights #GenderEquality

Negative societal attitudes and public discourse towards people of diverse sexual and gender identities and expressions still prevail in the region, and what is worse, are reinforced in laws, e.g. the banning of “homosexual propaganda” (Russia and Lithuania), or denying marriage equality by defining marriage as solely a union between a man and a woman (all countries of the region with the exception of Slovenia). When LGBTQ activists advocate for recognition of their human rights, they’re opposed with the attitudes emphasizing protection of traditional

values, relationships and family models, which strengthen stereotypes and support patriarchal views. This homophobic and transphobic approach negatively influences the health and lives of LGBTQ youth, hinders the realization of their human rights and leaves them vulnerable to discrimination and violence, leading to exclusion, low self-esteem, poor mental health, and in some cases, suicide.

Young LGBTQ people face discrimination and stigma from their earliest years, in everyday life and at an institutional level. One of the primary institutions that should play a role in promoting human rights and anti-discrimination attitudes are schools. Unfortunately, sexuality education, including anti-discrimination education, remains an issue all over the region. In recent years, various initiatives have emerged, trying to deny youth access to sexuality education. Slovakia’s referendum,



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which fortunately has failed, included a question around allowing children to skip sexuality education classes<sup>3</sup>. In Poland, the anti-choice initiative aimed to ban sexuality education in schools in order to 'protect children from depravation of so-called sex educators'<sup>4</sup>. A Romanian activist who created a youth-friendly sex-education platform called Sex vs. Stork, has experienced an anti-choice boycott of the project, and has been accused of corrupting minors and promoting homosexuality<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the programmes of sexuality education in the region are inadequate or non-existing, most often biased, promoting conservative values and disseminating stereotypes regarding sexuality.

One of Polish course books "Preparation for Family Life", approved by the Ministry of National Education, mentions homosexuality under the subsection dedicated to problems with sexuality and sex crimes<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, the curricula do not refer to LGBTQ specific needs when discussing sexual and reproductive health issues, thus leaving youth at higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and practicing unsafe sexual behaviours and attitudes. Considering the vast stigma experienced at schools, it comes as no surprise that LGBTQ people decide to hide or disguise their diversity during schooling<sup>7</sup>, which can further strengthen feelings of alienation and psychological distress.

This lack of evidence-based information on sexual diversity and the dissemination of harmful stereotypes might intensify homophobic and transphobic attitudes thus heightening the risk of violence and hate crimes towards LGBTQ people, as evidenced by the brutal murder of a young gay man after revealing his sexual orientation in Russia<sup>8</sup>.

Can this vicious circle of homophobia and transphobia be stopped? Implementation of bills supporting LGBTQ rights may provide some optimism (Malta's GIGESC Act<sup>9</sup>, marriage equality act in Slovenia), but it seems obvious that efforts leading to change of socio-cultural attitudes must be intensified in order to ensure that LGBTQ adolescents can live and develop in a society where they feel safe and where their diversity is appreciated.



Illustration by:  
Dr. Suman Pal  
23 | India

### Queer Poem

Vlad Levente Viski  
Romania

A poet's job is to be honest?  
I write not for the truth  
an urge to tell the story  
to document existence, feelings  
realities ignored,  
instances and failures.  
You tell me about love  
I tell you about resistance  
anger  
fears and frustrations  
there's no going back  
embrace the shame.  
Don't ask me stories about my personal  
self  
more important is my political self.  
Here is the broken lip  
over here is the open flesh  
no punch or thug will stop me  
nor will forgotten lovers.  
I take the risk of being me every day  
I do believe it is a fight  
I'm willing to continue  
against public morals  
gods and demons  
people and citizens willing to hate.  
I don't need your excuses  
I fight against your cowardice  
ultimate goal  
promotion of a queer agenda  
P-R-O-P-A-G-A-N-D-A  
PROPAGANDA  
you got it  
full blown war.  
I bring the private in the public sphere  
I exhibit  
I am vulgar  
my body becomes power  
I penetrate and get penetrated  
I come out  
I spread fear and doubt about everyone's  
sexuality  
I create conflict  
I am not normal  
I am subversive.

# The challenges that LGBTQI communities face in exercising their freedom of expression

SHRR  
25 | Pakistan

What I am about to write is something personal and quite dear to me. I will try to be as positive as possible because I prefer not to be cynical about the realities that lie before me. Being gay and living in a country riddled with religious fanaticism can have adverse effects on many. Most of the times, my respite is the Internet, looking at content that I can only dream or rather aspire to achieve.

Perhaps an even more immediate threat than the safeguarding of the rights and security of LGBTQI youth, is the dissolution of religious elements in human rights. It is indescribable to express how I feel when everyday, even walking down the street, I don't feel safe and getting back home feels like winning the lottery. The state of affairs of a country should not include indulging in the private lives of its citizens. The air is stifled right now with what is humane and what is sin. The dialogue needs to stop because discussing religion is not something that can be funneled down to something uniform. What we should

be focusing on is the betterment of the lives of young people from the LGBTQI community, on helping them to grow up to be productive citizens of the country they live in and also (perhaps the most important) to give them unconditional love, like any other child born into a family.

The plight of under developed nations is that they are so beset with "other" problems that the issue of sexual diversity is always swept under the rug by saying that LGBTQI issues are "not that important". This infuriates me to no end. Not only does it serve as an obstacle for pro-LGBTQI policies but it also starts a vicious cycle of waiting and delay. This period of limbo is perhaps the most excruciating.

I still wish for the day I can come out to my parents and not have religious verses thrown at me for committing "sins". But unfortunately it is something that is still as improbable as me having a biological child, which ironically is the first point of argument people have. However, I'm quite blessed to have a supportive group of friends who love me for me, not for my sexual orientation. It's a steep climb, I admit, but the view from the top must be worth it, for I am still climbing.



The CARICAN poster series was WOMANTRA's contribution to a Call to Action by the Catch-A-Fyah Caribbean Feminist Network, in response to mob-killings of gay and transgender Caribbean citizens in Haiti and Jamaica. Using Rosie the Riveter as a theme, the tagline "We Can Do It", is a call to lobby CARICOM (Caribbean community) governments to take a clear position on homophobic and transphobic violence. Contributors were asked to don their country flags and pump their muscles for peace!

All photos were published on August 19th in 2013 as part of a collective action across the Caribbean region but CARICAN has since instituted a rolling submission to increase participation and full Caribbean representation. You can see more images at the tumblr page: <http://carican.tumblr.com/>. This photo was submitted by Stephanie Leitch, 28, Trinidad and Tobago.

Why is taking a stand against homophobic and transphobic violence important to you?

*"For me it's about ensuring a satisfying existence. Doing nothing would be contrary to this."*

- Kizzy Abraham, Grenada Planned Parenthood Association, Grenada



# My Queer Romanian Experience

Alex Ward  
20 | Romania

I've been bashed, laughed and pointed at, nicknamed "freak", as if I wanted to be one.

Thrown in a corner, right into the trash can, denied of existence, identity erased.

Couldn't walk on the street in my small hometown, because everyone was looking, just like I was a creep.

Laughing at the girl who didn't know what she was, struggling hard to choose a side, a label, one category.

Between hypocrisy and dreams, between torment and a so-called peace, that never came to me.

Trying to act, to be who I was not, it meant for me to kill the man I was staring at... in the mirror and in dreams at night, picturing a figure of a boy who was... alive.

But to actually try to become that man in broad daylight I had to sign my trial with my own blood; expose myself, unarmed.

Trying to explain all those things to mom, what she never saw, who I really was, always blaming me, cuz I am not like the other girls.

Always trying to change who I really was.

Made people stare a lot, made them laugh at me, shout things that hurt, always asking me what I really was: are you a boy, are you a girl, or what the fuck are you?!

Oh, they weren't nice and never stopped their hate, disgust, just to wonder how it feels to be something that they are not. All they saw was them, they tried their best to see only what they want, blindly following the rules of a society of fools.

Always pointing fingers, always mocking me, threw me in a place where I did not want to be. Staring at the ceiling, at night, in the dark, asking myself, why I was alive.

I did not want to live, I did not want to breathe, because you, dear society, taught me that I am nothing but a freak.

"Dear abnormal person, dear fucked-up creep, you do not belong with us, we do not want you here" - this is what you told me, oh, society, maker of all rules, the one who has a word in how a man should drink his booze."

"You cannot be like this in a place full of normal people, who hide themselves as well, because they are afraid of judgement. You have to change yourself and align your appearance with the rules, with what is right. Be like the other fools. You have to fit in the crowd. Do not spoil our picture of this perfect society filled with drained and broken people".

"And if you wish not to listen to us why don't you just... simply... disappear in the fog?! Just go and kill yourself, because you don't belong. You are not normal, you don't get along with what we have in here. You are destroying our families. You are a threat to us. I don't want my child to see your kind, cuz he'll grow up like you..."

...and that, I do not want.

So you see, it's just a choice, you say, to be queer or not. You say that I can simply look at others and decide: "Yes, I want that". But let me tell you something, it doesn't work like that. You don't choose to be someone you are not, if you do not feel that it isn't what you want.

And now I've learnt the way things work and I want to say: dear society, go screw yourself because you have no say in my call of who I am.



Roberta Orlando  
27 | Italy

The Word of God (2011), photo from the Europride Photo Book



# Third Gender in Nepal

Article by:  
**Dwaipayana Regmi**  
25 | Nepal

Illustration by:  
**Praveen Kumar Tankala**  
21 | India

Nepal is a country where the majority of the population practices Hinduism. Early myths include stories of *Shikhandi*, *Arjuna* and *Ila*, all characters representing the third gender. These historical characters show that there is a clear framework of the existence of third gender people in Hindu society since ancient times.

Although the Supreme Court of Nepal has ruled that the new democratic government must create laws to protect LGBTIQ rights and change existing discriminatory laws<sup>1</sup>, society has not changed and views those who identify as third gender with concern and sympathy. Society has not yet accepted the idea of a third gender and keeps the issue hidden. It is seen as criminal or offensive to find third gender people in Nepal.

Efforts are being carried out to ensure the rights of third gender people. The Nepali movie *Sungava*, showed how people who identify as third gender face trouble in the Nepalese context. The movie aimed to create awareness and encourage society to respect third gender people. However, because there are no laws or acts protecting them, they continue to face many problems. It is not that non-governmental organizations are not working to raise awareness, but there has to be support from parliament to address this issue.

On November 18th, 2008, the Supreme Court directed the government to enact equal rights laws for LGBT citizens<sup>2</sup>; however these laws have not been put into practice. And while the Supreme Court formally recognized a lesbian relationship in 2012<sup>3</sup>, there has been no act to date recognizing third gender people. The only progress in this regard has been in the form of the “Other” option added after “Male” and “Female” on forms that ask about gender.

The country still remains in the dark on this issue. The first challenge that people who identify with a third gender face, is from their family. Family members,



for the most part, do not accept it at all. They feel cursed when they find out that their child identifies as neither male nor female. Even if family members are accepting, society will not accept them. One way that Nepalese society views third gender people is as “Chakkas” -a derogatory term used for Indian third gender people who collect money along the Indian Railway. They face persecution and assault from various members of society, which is strange as the same people pray for Arjuna. It is a huge insult to third gender people in the society.

Blame goes to Nepal, which has not taken any initiative

to promote third gender people. There have been special accommodations made for other marginalized communities and ethnic groups; however no steps have been taken to promote the acceptance of third gender people in this regard. In fact, there has been news regarding the attack and attempted rape of third gender people in Nepal, which the government has tried to suppress. It does not seem to be a priority of the media either, and because of this, the concern does not grow. Further, third gender people face problems even when they apply for jobs, leaving them with the options of hiding their identity or being rejected.

There are organizations like the Blue Diamond Society<sup>4</sup>, which has been working with the vision of creating societies that respect and value sexual and gender minorities, where sexual and gender minorities can live with equal rights and dignity, and where all sexual and gender minorities have hope and opportunity. However, the time for this seems far away, when parents will happily say that their child is gay, or lesbian, bisexual, transgender, third gender, intersexual or questioning.

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