



THE WATCHDOG

The Youth Coalition's Quarterly Newsletter

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The End of Another Year... The Start of A New One

By Pamela Pizarro, Watchdog Editor

The Youth Coalition Office has been working hard to put together a new and improved website. For the past several months, a complete overhaul of the existing page has taken place, with a new more user-friendly website format taking its place. We have tried to update the page with all our recent activities, added links, and have included more back editions of the Watchdog as well as special event Watchdog issues.

We are very proud of our new website and must thank a couple of people, who without their hard work, we would not have been able to finish on time. Thank you to Rob Sherwood, Monika Rahman, Nick Carkner, and of course to all the members and colleagues who sent us their input for the final touches.

To view our new website please go to www.youthcoalition.org, where you will find our new splash/intro page and our new website. To send us your feedback on our new page, please click on the Contact Us section, where you will be able to send us an email directly.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of our readers for your support over the last year, and we will try to continue to make the Watchdog a success in the year to come.



youth coalition

Working Internationally for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

CONTACT US!

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MEMBER'S PROFILES



Kwabena Asamoah, 26, is from Ghana and is currently living in Accra. He is a graduate from the University of Ghana and has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science with a minor in Economics. Kwabena is currently working with UNFPA on the African Youth Alliance Project, which deals with adolescent sexual and reproductive health. In addition to being the documentation officer at AYA Ghana, he works as the focal person for the youth and for the media. Kwabena is also an editorial board member for an advocacy magazine (GHAYA), as well as an editorial board member for a youth newspaper that AYA co-sponsors (Junior Graphic).

Kwabena has worked with ASRH since 2001 when he worked with the Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs as part of his national service. As part of Kwabena's work there, he was in charge of a group that organized seminars in Junior and Senior Secondary schools to inform young people on HIV/AIDS and other STI's. Since then, Kwabena has had the opportunity to be part of training programs in such areas as facilitation skills, advocacy, proposal writing, interviewing, mediation, communication material development and ASRH Advocacy through the mass media. He has also had the opportunity to be part of a number of advocacy projects within AYA. In 2003 Kwabena gained some insight into international advocacy when he attended the Africa Advocacy workshop organized by the Youth Coalition.

Tanya Baker, 23, is a third year Midwifery student at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver and has a bachelor of science in Integrated Sciences combining life sciences and international health. She is the Chair of the Global Outreach Students' Association at UBC whose mandate is improve the health of marginalized populations both locally and abroad. In addition, she is the Western Canada representative for the Student University Network for Social and International Health. Tanya is a strong believer that the enhancement of youth sexual rights and increased youth participation leads to the betterment of health and welfare of a population.





This is one of the handouts that youth participants from Choice, YC, and YouAct created for distribution at the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Meeting in Geneva December 2004.



YOUTH FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

WHO ARE WE?

We are a group of young people committed to women's rights. We come from various countries and diverse backgrounds. Youth for Women's Rights consists of young people from the Youth Coalition, CHOICE for youth and sexuality, YouAct European Youth Network on sexual and reproductive rights, Astra Youth young people from Central, Eastern and South Europe for sexual and reproductive health and rights and other young people who support young women's rights and the Beijing Platform for Action. Youth for Women's Rights has been active throughout the Beijing+5 and Beijing+10 processes.

WHY YOUNG WOMEN?

Young women's specific needs are often overlooked because we are a group that lies physically, emotionally, economically and socially between girls and women. To guarantee that our needs are addressed and our rights respected, we believe that young women must be represented and involved in decision-making, at all levels. The full participation of young women is a vital strategy to continue the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing+5 Further Actions. On top of that, our participation ensures that it does not stop at Beijing; Beijing is just the beginning!

DON'T GET OUR RIGHTS WRONG!

- R**eproductive and sexual health
- I**nformation, education and services, including access to safe abortion
- G**ender equality and freedom from discrimination and violence
- H**IV/AIDS prevention and treatment
- T**reated as equal partners in all decision-making process
- S**exual pleasure

YOUTH FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVOCATE FOR:

- Young women's human rights, especially sexual and reproductive rights
- The full participation of young women at all levels of decision-making
- The elimination of all forms of discrimination, based on gender, age, race, culture, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic background, disabilities, immigration status, marital status, geographical location.
- Access to information and education, including comprehensive sexuality education, for young people world wide
- Young women's access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, that are specific to our needs and respect our rights to privacy and confidentiality
- The elimination of legal, cultural, religious and socio-economic barriers that hinder young women's development and empowerment
- The allocation of financial and other resources to young women to promote our empowerment
- The right to sexual pleasure and to enjoy our sexuality free of guilt
- The right to be involved in and benefit from the development of new technologies



Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender rights are human rights!

By Joana Chagas, Brazil

In 2003, the Brazilian delegation introduced a historical resolution on sexual orientation during the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). The resolution “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights” (E/CN.4/2003/L.92), of 17 April 2003, recalls on the recognition that every human being is born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms.

Based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Brazilian resolution recognizes the occurrence of violations of human rights against persons on the grounds of their sexual orientation and that the enjoyment of their rights and freedoms should not be hindered in any way, calling upon the states to “promote and protect the human rights of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation”.

Last April, the Brazilian resolution was on the agenda of the 60th Session of the UNCHR, but the debate was once again postponed for the session next year. There are rumors that there were trade-offs, and that the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) – which

was leading the opposition side by side with the Vatican – threatened to boycott the UNCTAD meeting that would take place in Brazil a couple of months later, if the resolution was pushed forward for discussion. Furthermore, there were many concerns that the resolution could be defeated or even



withdrawn from the UN agenda.

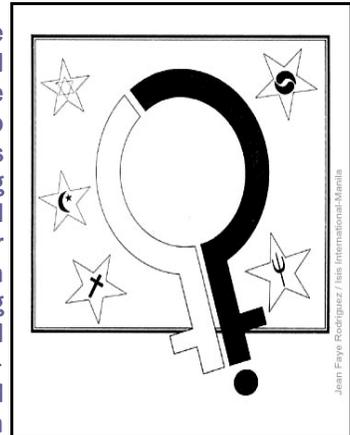
So, no votes nor debates arose at the UNCHR 60th Session: there was no objection nor opposition to the Brazilian request to defer the consultation of the draft resolution.

The fact that the discussion on the Brazilian resolution has been postponed already twice only shows how many UN Member States in the Commission on Human Rights do not want to recognize the violations to the human rights of people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity nor to discuss the “controversial” language on sexual rights.

Many NGOs and networks working with the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders (GBLT) were in Geneva at that time and were pleased that the issue of sexual orientation and human rights was still kept on the agenda. Whereas there was disappointment that the resolution could not be passed, at least there is another chance and a whole year to mobilize and strategize for the 61st Session, in 2005.

It is very important that the Brazilian resolution on human rights and sexual orientation be discussed next year and that GBLT and SRR organizations be present to advocate for the inclusion of a language that takes into account the diversity of gender identities. For example, the term “sexual orientation” is insufficient to protect the rights of transgendered people, urging that there is a discussion on the definition of terms such as “gender identity”, and that the final resolution explicitly includes it as a ground of protection.

In addition, the participation and advocacy of young people is fundamental to guarantee that our needs and concerns regarding our sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity are also taken into account. Young people face an additional form of discrimination – a g e - b a s e d discrimination – which impacts in young people’s rights and the states have the obligation to combat it.



Young people have the right to education, including sexual education, and to have access to factual, non-judgemental information about sexuality in order to be able to make informed decisions. Young people have the right to privacy, the basis for individual’s right to make decisions about sexuality free from interference. Young people have the right to be free from discrimination and violence, regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity.

In many countries, to be gay or lesbian is considered a crime, sometimes punitive with death. All over the world gay, lesbian, bisexuals and specially transgenders are subject to harassment, humiliation, verbal and physical abuse related to their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Homophobic rhetoric, abuse and violence by state actors such as the police, and also by society and by their own families are some of the human rights violations on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, even in those countries where there is no legal discrimination.

This must stop! Let’s support the Brazilian resolution on human rights and sexual orientation, and reaffirm that gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender rights are human rights!

For more information on the Brazilian Resolution, visit:
www.brazilianresolution.org
www.igla.org



Unidos por el amor y por la ley

*By Marisa Rojas, Argentina**

“Desde que nos unimos civilmente con Marcelo nos peleamos más, como todos los matrimonios”, comenta entre risas César Cigliutti, presidente de la Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA). César y Marcelo fueron la primera pareja gay que se unió civilmente en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, y en Argentina, el viernes 18 de julio del 2003. Y aunque el presidente de la CHA bromea sobre qué cambió en su pareja desde aquel entonces, sabe que se trató de un paso trascendental en la lucha por los derechos de la comunidad gay-lésbico-travesti-transsexual-bisexual (GLTTB) del país. “No hay obstáculos suficientes cuando peleás con firmeza. Este es el fruto de años de trabajo, es el producto del esfuerzo de toda la comunidad homosexual argentina. Esta ha sido una lucha personal y política”, sentencia Cigliutti.

El mayor logro obtenido al momento por la CHA lleva el número 1004. Se trata de la Ley de Unión Civil, la norma legal de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires que reconoce la unión de las parejas homosexuales. La Ley otorga a los miembros de la comunidad GLTTB los mismos derechos laborales y de seguridad social que a los integrantes de las parejas heterosexuales:

- ser incluidos en la obra social de la pareja
- visitar a sus parejas en los hospitales públicos y recibir los partes médicos
- solicitar créditos de vivienda y planes de desempleo
- presentarse ante cualquier trámite como pareja legal de hecho

El proyecto de ley fue presentado ante la comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Legislatura de la ciudad a fines del 2001. Un año más tarde, en la madrugada del 14 de diciembre del 2002, y después de 18 horas de sesión continua, la Legislatura porteña aprobó la ley. Así, y por primera vez en toda América Latina, se reconocen derechos civiles a “las parejas que hayan convivido en una relación de afectividad estable y pública por un período mínimo de dos años, con independen-

cia de su sexo u orientación sexual”. Pedro Paradiso Sottile, abogado, Coordinador del área legal de la CHA, recuerda hoy que “en un principio casi nadie apostaba que la ley de unión civil iba a salir. Pero nosotros estábamos convencidos que el trabajo de todos estos años iba a tener sus frutos porque sabíamos que el proyecto era serio, era posible porque era técnicamente indiscutible”.

La ley, aprobada por 29 votos a favor y 10 en contra – todos provenientes de sectores ortodoxos asociados a intereses de la Iglesia Católica, única institución que se manifestó públicamente en contra del proyecto– no habla de derechos civiles como la adopción –el aspecto más controvertido- o la sucesión, tópicos que en realidad sólo pueden modificarse por ley nacional ya que se trata de espacios del derecho sólo los que la Ciudad no tiene injerencia. Es en esa lucha en la que se encuentra abocada hoy la Coalición Nacional para la Unión Civil. En ese orden es que la XIII Marcha del Orgullo GLTTB, realizada a comienzos de noviembre en Buenos Aires, tuvo por consigna: “UNION CIVIL para todo el país, YA”. UNION CIVIL para los más de 3 millones de argentinos ‘putos’, ‘travestis’, ‘tortas’, ‘bomberos’, ‘osos’, ‘locas’ (todos estos términos refieren a distintos apodos que se emplean para nombrar a l@s homosexuales en Argentina). Un 10% de la población total del país que permanece, en su mayoría, en el silencio, por vergüenza, por temor, por miedo a ser considerados ‘ciudadanos de segunda’.

Primero fue Holanda, en el 2001; dos años más tarde, en junio del 2003, sería el turno de Bélgica. A comienzos de octubre de este año fue posible también en España. ¿Podremos prontamente incluir a la Argentina en esta lista de países que aceptan las uniones de gays, lesbianas, travestis, transexuales, transgéneros y bisexuales? Con matices diversos en cada lado, lo importante es que se trata de una norma que habla de sociedades mejores: abiertas, tolerantes, igualitarias. Como dijo el presidente de España, Rodríguez Zapatero, “contra nadie, sino a favor de una comunidad donde haya espacio para todos”.

** Marisa Rojas is a young journalist from Argentina. She is currently working on her thesis about gay rights and communications.*



Equality in Western Europe: Feminism needs a little sister!

By Anneke Wensing, YOUACT

In many countries in Western Europe it is generally assumed that emancipation is finished. Equality has been reached and women's rights don't have to be reviewed or discussed anymore, except when talking about less developed countries. Recently in the Netherlands the function of Minister of Emancipation was cancelled, because emancipation was not thought of as an issue anymore. I will not say that there hasn't been much progress made, but even in the most advanced countries, total equality is not a reality. Emancipation is an ongoing process that is never complete and we should stay active to guarantee and safeguard equality and equity between men and women.

In many countries women are still paid less than men. This is not only true because so called 'women's jobs' are usually less well-paid than typical 'men's jobs', but even when men and women are doing the exact same job, women are more likely to receive a lower salary. On a social level, this leads to women being financially dependant on men, which undermines equality. Additionally, women are less often working in top-positions and are participating less in politics.



Receiving a lower salary and serving less in top-positions is closely interlinked with women doing most of the housekeeping and childcare. Because women's work is seen to be worth less than men's work, they more often give up their jobs when they have children. On top of that, it is still socially unacceptable for men to be caring fathers and work less to take care of their children: men often have to fight for even taking only half a day off and proper paternity leave is virtually non-existent.

Political commitment is crucial to achieving real equality. It has been shown that policies, that actively promote women's participation and take away barriers that maintain inequality, have very positive effects, both for men and women. However, a strong and united voice of women is somewhat lacking to pressure their governments to address these issues. Amazing progress has been made during the past decades by women that have actively and tirelessly been fighting for their rights.

Is the younger generation apathetic to the things that still have to be done? No, I don't think so. To me, a lack of knowledge about gender issues and gender inequality, combined with a prejudiced view on feminism and a totally different reality than 30 years ago, are causing young women not to take over the reigns of the battle. We need education and effective handovers between generations to ensure that the fight continues with the same energy. On the other hand, we also need to accept that younger women might have different approaches than their 'ansisters' and that's not a bad thing.

So this is a call to all women who have opened so many doors for us and gave us so many opportunities: let's work together and make sure that the fight never ends!



Youth Activism or Self Promotion?

By Tanya Baker, Canada

Youth activists are often excellent critics of policies, activities, actions and decisions carried out by adults that can directly or indirectly affect young people's lives, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. However, as youth activists, we rarely critically analyze our own actions and decisions with respect to our individual goals and objectives of the work we do. Frequently, the primary argument given for the need for youth participation and advocacy is to provide a much-needed youth perspective and youth dynamic to the discussions, like having all the stakeholders present at the table. But are the youth activists at the table truly the stakeholders? Who are we 'representing' when we provide a youth perspective? Young people are an immensely diverse and dynamic population group, with many factors that influence our ideas and behaviours, consequently youth activists should not be considered representative of an entire population of young people, and as youth activists, we should not portray ourselves as representing anyone other than ourselves and our perspectives.



Many young people become activists with a vision of a better world and methods of working together, which can be lauded by the adult community who have lived and worked in the 'real world'. However idealism should not be considered a negative attribute and be forgotten or pushed aside. But like all mammals, youth activists are not altruistic and

we personally benefit a great deal from our hard work and energy. This should not be misconstrued as support for the exploitive practices of paying young people significantly less money or respect for their equal work because of the experiences we are receiving, but it does imply that youth activists are not working entirely without personal gain or reward, even if there are no direct monetary gains. The benefits of receiving new contacts, recognition, writing skills, communication skills, resources for activities or publications and critical thinking skills are all very important for personal and professional development.



If we don't recognize and take ownership over these aspects of youth activism and instead only believe that we are doing this to 'help' young people around the world because we know how the world should be, then we can start to become what we most abhor, exclusionary self promoters on our way to careers with increased power and prestige. As youth activists we need the strength and courage to deeply reflect on such issues and use the well fought for youth space as a means of promoting the rights of young people and not for promoting ourselves as individuals.



Playing it safe in Bulgaria

By Dessislava Doncheva, Bulgaria

We all know how important youth participation is and how it must be encouraged. As a response to increased participation, youth are getting more and more involved in the decision-making processes and in governance.

In Bulgaria the situation is similar to that in many other countries. A pioneer in the recognition of youth participation is the Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (BPPA). Today, the BPPA has more than 120 youth volunteers all around the country. They all are full of energy and ideas. Thanks to their help the unique youth information network "Play it safe" is successfully being tapped into by young people throughout the country for information about HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted infections prevention. This new network is also distributing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) promotional materials.

We also have a network of youth volunteers in major cities, who are constantly contacting the owners of roadside reststations asking them for use of a small space for promotional SRHR materials. Volunteers are also organizing a parades, where they throw flyers from the highest floors of buildings and are going into discos to offer young people informational and "protective" materials.

Through these different ways youth are increasing the information level about HIV/AIDS among people in the reproductive age group and trying to help form attitudes towards responsible behavior. And for those of you who are already asking themselves is it effective we can only say - "Yes". The outcomes and the results are much higher than the expected and more and more young people are getting in contact with the BPPA eager to learn and help more.

Central and Eastern European Advocacy Training Workshop December 8 - 12th, 2004 Belgrade Serbia

Congratulations to all the participants and facilitators of the Central and Eastern European Advocacy Training Workshop for a successful event which brought together youth from the region. The workshop was organized by YouAct, the Youth of Jazas, and the Youth Coalition .



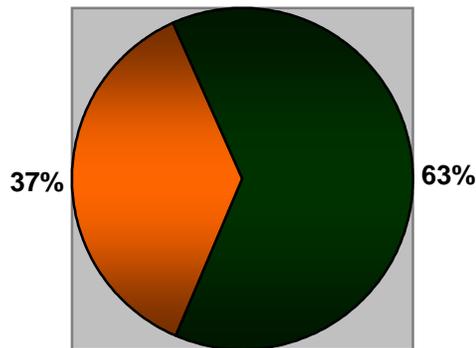
OPINION POLL: FOCUS INDIA



Abortion is one of the most debated topics today in the field of development. With the Bush administration imposing the Global Gag Rule* abortion and illegal abortions have started to get more coverage in the international media. Our member from India, Lavanya Keshavraj, conducted this poll amongst 76 educated young Indian women and men between the ages of 18 - 29, in order to get a better sense of where Indian youth stand on the issue.

*For more information on the Global Gag Rule, please visit www.globalgagrule.org

Do you agree that young women have the right to abortion?



Reasons stated were given by the youth themselves, it was not given as options.

If Yes, Why?

- 48% It may be a risk to a woman's life especially during the adolescence.
- 36% It may hinder the development of a young woman economically.
- 16% Mental health of a young woman may get affected if pregnancy is unwanted.

If No, Why?

- 67% Abortion is a sin
- 28% If abortion is made a right for all young women, morality in the society will be lost
- 5% It is the denial of Right to Life of the foetus

Articles in The Watchdog express the views of the individual authors and not of the Youth Coalition.