

# **Press Release: International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia 2014 Commemorations in Botswana**

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The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) is commemorated globally and annually on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. This year's commemorations are celebrated under the theme "Freedom to Express". The day is set aside to raise awareness on LGBTIQ issues and rights, to create a platform for dialogue on lives of LGBTIQ and how homophobia and transphobia affects the lives of the LGBTIQ. IDAHOT also aims to celebrate the struggles and milestones LGBTIQ individuals and human rights organizations have had over the years in making human rights agenda priority. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity remains issues of contention and division tools in many countries. Today The Botswana Network On Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS (BONELA), Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO) and Rainbow Identity Association (RIA) wishes to highlight political, social, economic and structural barriers facing the LGBTIQs in Botswana and worldwide.

Botswana is considered by many to be a conservative and Christian state. This has however hindered a lot of human rights advancements including sexual orientation and gender identity issues. Homophobic and transphobic attacks happen in Botswana.

The Penal Code of Botswana and other governing laws and policies make it difficult for LGBTIQs to express themselves in the way they feel. Attacks on the LGBTIQs and LEGABIBO continue to spring from various members of this community. Most of the homophobia seem to be based on religious believes.

IDAHOT 2014 activities aim to address issues of Homophobia and Transphobia in Botswana, giving the LGBTI the platform to talk about issues and problems they face daily with the hope to create a conducive and enabling environment to dialogue with the relevant stakeholders and the public at large.

The three organisations and their partners will be commemorating IDAHOT through various activities spread through three days. Day one of the commemorations will start with a press conference and followed by a panel discussion under the theme "Is Botswana a Homo-transphobic Country, Perspective from affected communities). The second day will be a night of spoken word against Homophobia and Transphobia on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May (from 1800hrs) at Thapong Arts Centre (opposite Village Clinic) at Village, Gaborone. It is at this space that the LGBTIQs will express themselves artistically through poem recitals, song, dance and storytelling. The last day will be celebrated by having a power march from Game City Supermall to Kgale Hill at 0800am. Once at the hill, a candlelight vigil will be conducted and multi-lingual prayers will be recited by different attendants. The festivities will continue from 1400hrs with an Expression show held at Somarelo Tikologo Ecological Park.

These three partners strongly believe that human rights are innate and are not selective. Every member of our community is entitled to a dignified and respected existence on this earth. LGBTIQs are not outcast of those rights and should be treated as such.

BONELA, LEGABIBO & Rainbow Identity Association calls upon all Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, the government and the entire republic of Botswana to join forces in advocating for equality, non-discrimination at health settings and access to prevention, treatment, care and support of all regardless of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Most importantly, we are all asked to stand up against injustices. "Fatshe leno la rona", a re tsheleng ka kagiso.

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