

**Launch of the report:
Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation
and gender identity in Europe
Strasbourg, 23 June 2011**

**Speech by Rt Hon Dominic Grieve, QC, MP
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Introduction

I want to start by thanking Commissioner Hammarberg for inviting me here to talk at the launch of this important report.

Across Europe it is clear that there has been a great deal of progress in recent years on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality.

In Britain, as recently as 1967 (when the law was finally changed), people like the pioneer of computer sciences, Alan Turing, could still be prosecuted for homosexual acts between consenting adults.

In 1952 Turing was forced to accept chemical castration as an alternative to prison - a disgraceful way to treat one of our greatest scientists.

Now, we have many openly gay and lesbian people in all walks of life – from politics, to science, to business.

But it is clear that there is still an enormously long way still to go.

Across Europe, there are still too many tragic incidents of hate crime.

There is still too much outdated prejudice.

And there is still too much ignorance and intolerance of LGB&T people.

Every government has a responsibility to protect all of its people, no matter what their sexual orientation or their gender identity.

Human Rights

All Council of Europe countries are party to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Article 14 of the Convention states that all rights and freedoms must be secured without discrimination on any grounds.

The European Court of Human Rights has recognised that this includes discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

But despite this, and despite the fact that homosexuality has now been decriminalised in all member states of the Council of Europe, LGB&T people and their defenders continue to face deeply rooted prejudices, hostility and widespread discrimination all over Europe.

They can face physical violence and verbal abuse.

They can face restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.

They can face violations of the right to respect for private and family life.

And they can face violations of rights to education, work and health.

This is all coupled with frequent and regular stigmatisation.

As a consequence, too many LGB&T people across Europe still live in fear and have to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Just think how terrible a feeling that must be for a person living in modern day Europe.

So it is vitally important that all European countries ensure that tackling violence and discrimination against LGB&T people remains at the top of their human rights agenda.

The recommendations in the Commissioner's report will assist member states in taking take action to combat violence and discrimination in this area and we warmly welcome his report.

We will now look to build on the momentum created within the Council of Europe, and to work with other countries to implement these recommendations.

UK Government's work to progress LGB&T equality

I am proud to say that the UK is already doing a great deal to tackle discrimination and to promote equal opportunities and equal treatment for all.

In March we published the UK's first ever cross-Government action plan on LGB&T equality.

It outlined an ambitious range of actions we will take from tackling homophobic bullying in schools, and improving our response rate to hate crime, to promoting LGB&T rights abroad.

I wanted to highlight just a few of the areas where we are taking action that will be of particular interest to other countries in Europe.

Many of them fit well with the conclusions of the Commissioner's report and they will, in time, address most of the areas where we still need to make progress.

Civil partnerships

So building on our existing Civil Partnership legislation, which has been a huge success, we have begun a consultation on allowing religious organisations that wish to do so to host civil partnership registrations.

We are looking at this issue because religious groups, like the Quakers, have told us they want to host civil partnership registrations. Let me make clear, no organisation that does not want to host a civil partnership registration will have to do so.

It is crucial to strike the right balance between LGB equality and religious freedom.

And our ambitions go even further. We will look at how legislation can develop in future for equal civil marriages and civil partnerships.

Sports

We have also launched a charter to tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport.

The main sport national governing bodies – including the Football Association - and over 1,100 individuals have already signed up.

We need many more to spread the message in the UK and around the world that there is no room for homophobia and transphobia in sports. We all need to work together to make sport a welcoming environment for all.

Hate crime

We have improved the recording of hate crimes against LGB&T people. From April this year, police forces have been required to collect this data which will be published next year as official statistics.

And “True vision” a new hate crime information website which includes an online hate crime reporting portal, went live in February this year.

Transgender equality

We have started engaging with the transgender community so they can shape the first ever Government transgender equality action plan, which we will publish by the end of this year.

Our first survey to the transgender community received almost 1,300 responses. This is the biggest survey of the trans community ever conducted in the UK.

International commitments

But our action and our commitment does not stop at our borders.

We recognise that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people continue to suffer persecution across the world. Homosexuality is still illegal in over 70 countries worldwide and punishable by death in 8.

We are committed to ensuring that all people are free to live their lives in a safe and just environment.

And we have already achieved a great deal to progress LGB&T equality internationally.

We have stopped the deportation of asylum seekers who have had to leave particular countries because their sexual orientation or gender identity puts them at proven risk of imprisonment, torture or execution.

We played an active role in the development of the Council of Europe’s recommendations ‘Measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity’. We will work towards their full implementation in the UK and across Europe.

We strongly supported the UN statement on human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender equality, which was supported by over 80 countries.

And I am delighted that the UN Human Rights Council has passed a historic resolution noting concerns about acts of violence and discrimination committed against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, wherever they live. This is a groundbreaking achievement and testament to the real progress we are making on this agenda.

So we have achieved much. But these are only the first steps. There is still a lot more to do.

We will to continue to use our political dialogue with other countries to push for the recognition of LGB&T rights and advocate changes to discriminatory practices and laws.

Conclusions

A great deal of progress has already been made, but there is much still to do.

Today’s report is a blueprint for future action to progress lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality across Europe.

Every country in Europe needs to act as a leader, a catalyst and an advocate for change.

Because alone we can only ever make limited progress. It will take all of us in the international community to make LGB&T equality a reality.

The Council of Europe can be the driving force, if we all get our own house in order first.

Our message should be clear. Equality is for everyone. Let us work together to make homophobia and transphobia history.

Thank you.