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# Covid-19 Related Hate and Homophobia Must Stop

To:

Mr. Victor Madrigal-Borloz, UN Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity

Mr. Joseph Cannataci, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy

Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Mr. David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Ms. Alena Douhan, UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights

Mr. Dainius Puras, UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Ms. Karima Bennoune, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Mr. Javaid Rehman, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

17 May 2020

Your Excellencies,

The undersigned of this joint letter write as representatives of regional, and local LGBTI organisations to call on the UN experts to take every necessary measure to counter Covid-19 related hate speech and violence against LGBTI community.

The LGBTI community around the world [is often blamed](https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/09/07/13-unbelievable-things-lgbt-people-have-been-blamed-for/) for most the world’s problems, from hurricanes and floods to financial crises. The Covid-19 pandemic has been no exception; in many countries around the world, homophobic and anti-LGBTI groups and politicians use different forms of rhetoric to [blame this community for what is a natural and human-made disaster](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lgbt/religious-figures-blame-lgbt-people-for-coronavirus-idUSKBN20W2HL).

Political and religious leaders in many countries including [Iran](https://ana.ir/fa/news/4/482920/%DB%B7-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AA%E2%80%8C-%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%81%D9%87%D9%85%D8%AF-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A8%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%AF%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA), [Turkey](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/01/turkey-criminal-case-opposing-homophobic-speech), [United States](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lgbt/religious-figures-blame-lgbt-people-for-coronavirus-idUSKBN20W2HL), [Israel](https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/03/09/israel-rabbi-coronavirus-pride-parade-gay-god-divine-punishment-covid19-meir-mazuz/) and [Ukraine](https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/04/14/ukraine-patriarch-filaret-orthodox-church-kiev-patriarchate-homophobia-insight-lawsuit-coronavirus/) are spreading misinformation about Covid-19 that incites violence and discrimination against LGBTI people. As [noted by the World Health Organisation](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/disinformation-and-coronavirus), this form of disinformation only fuels the existing stigma and discrimination. This is exactly what has been happening for the LGBTI community in many countries.

For instance, in Ukraine, the leader of the country's biggest Orthodox congregations with 15 million followers, said on a national television network channel, that the outbreak was god's punishment for the sins of human beings and foremost of all, same-sex marriage.

Several Christian and Jewish leaders in the United States have also linked the pandemic to the LGBTI movement. These include the U.S. radio host and Protestant Minister, Earl Walker Jackson, who called the movement “‘homovirus’ for the family”.

This misinformation compounds the many other challenges that the LGBTI community faces as result of the crisis as well as their previously existing challenges. In countries like Iran where same-sex relations are criminalised, state-sponsored hate speech is common practice, sexual orientation and gender identity are medicalised, and LGBTI are generally persecuted, numerous republication of the homophobic opinions such as the one stated by Muqtada al-Sadr’s make the lives of LGBTI community members even more unbearable. The influential Iraqi Shia cleric stated in a [tweet thread](https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/3/28/prominent-iraqi-cleric-blames-coronavirus-pandemic-on-gay-marriage) that legalisation of same sex marriage caused this health crisis calling on governments worldwide to revoke those laws.

Furthermore, state policies in tackling the pandemic in some countries may reinforce the already in place homophobic attitudes in conservative societies. Such is the example of [South Korea](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/11/south-korea-struggles-to-contain-new-outbreak-amid-anti-lgbt-backlash) where the trace and test method with a special focus on those who had visited businesses in gay districts resulted in fear of being forcibly outed, which could cause loss of jobs and social and family status.

Similarly, isolating in homes with unsupportive family members can become a cause for suffering violence and ill-treatment. Many LGBTI people can also face violence from intimate partner without the possibility to seek legal help due to the fear of maltreatment at the hands of authorities and other repercussions. Seclusion can also worsen existing mental health problems that are common among LGBTI. These include for example, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

The undersigned organisations take the opportunity on this 17th of May, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia to urge the international community to do everything in their capacity and work together to end this alarming misinformation and stop the LGBTI community from being demonised.

As the LGBTI organisations, we want to emphasise the scale of violence and discrimination that the Iranian LGBTI face and the importance of highlighting this issue so that it is not overlooked. The key actors around the world have an important role to play in not letting the violence and discrimination faced by the LGBTI to be sidelined. Overlooking these issues paves the way and emboldens anti-LGBTI figures and groups to further stigmatise and demonise this community. Blaming the LGBTI for coronavirus must stop and violence against this community must not be overlooked, especially in this time of crisis.

**Signatories:**

1. 6Rang (Iranian Lesbian & Transgender Network) - Iran

## MOSAIC-Mena Organization for Services Advocacy Integration & Capacity building - Lebanon

1. Korean sexual-minority Culture & Rights Center - South Korea
2. Society of transsexual Women of the Philippines - Philippines
3. Diversity and Solidarity Trust - Sri Lanka

In order to assess the concrete effects of Covid 19 on LGBTI Iranians, 6Rang conducted a research survey in Iran. This survey primarily targeted LGBTI Iranian. However, due to the religious extremists spreading hatred about the causes of Covid-19 pandemic, we decided that instead of publishing a special report on the effects of Covid-19 and quarantine on the LGBTI community we will address the impact of such hatred on this community. We have previously sent you the statement that we issued on this matter on 16 May.

We would like to briefly share with you the results of this survey on Corona's impact:

* More than 160 people took part in our survey, which was only online for a few days. These were from more than 30 cities in Iran and from different regions. More than 40 percent of them belonged to ethnic minorities and two of them were persons with disabilities.
* More than 42 percent identify themselves as not being Muslim Shiites (including Christians, Sunnis, atheists, or Jews).
* More than 90 percent of them have been in quarantine and have had to stay at home for more than six weeks.
* Of those, only 25 percent were "out" at home, and the rest hid their sexual orientation and gender identity from their families.
* More than 75% of them believe that being at home and quarantining has had a significant impact on their relationships.
* 70% of them believe that the government has not provided the necessary services and measures to maintain their health, 25% consider it limited and insufficient, while only 5% of them find these measures satisfactory.
* More than 50 percent reported experiencing increased violence during this period. Part of the remaining 50 percent have said since they had been experiencing violence before the quarantine, for them no significant change has taken place. This means that the overall situation continues to deteriorate.
* Quarantine has affected the relationships of more than 60 percent of them their partner, and they express dissatisfaction with the experience of separation, non-recognition of their right to contact their partners, and so on.
* More than 85 percent reported deteriorating mental health. And only 40 percent of all respondents said they generally have someone at home to support them. In other words, another 60 percent lack the minimum support at home.

In addition to the answers to this survey, 6Rang has come across requests in recent days that indicate a loss of home due to the inability to pay rent, loss of a job, and consequently, financial difficulties in securing hormones or the continuation of surgeries and other health necessities.