

17<sup>th</sup> May 2008

**IDAHO: International Day Against Homophobia**

**Volks Railway, Madeira Drive, Brighton.**

Text of the speech given by:

**Caroline Lucas MEP**, South East England

Green candidate for the Westminster seat of Brighton (Pavilion)

It's brilliant to see you all here tonight and we're here because we've got a very important message, and our message is this:

- **the rights of LGBT communities right across the world MUST be upheld, and**
- **we pledge ourselves to working to pursue that aim, and**
- **we won't stop until it's achieved!**

It's truly shocking to recall that it's only 18 years since the World Health Organisation removed "homosexuality" from the list of so called mental disorders... but that is the anniversary we are marking here in Brighton today. There has been progress. But there remain 77 countries around the world where homosexual acts are still a criminal offence and the 7 countries where the punishment is ...execution.

And so...

- **we condemn this as a direct affront to international human rights law, and**
- **we demand that our government and the EU stop turning a blind eye to these atrocities, and**
- **we demand that they work to help to end them.**

The theme for this year IDAHO event is 'women' – which gives us the opportunity to reflect on the compound discrimination faced by LGBT women: as women stereotyped by a sexist society, then by being lesbian in a homophobic society, often isolated within the wider LGBT community.

Take the example of Pegah Emambakhsh, a lesbian, who Gordon Brown is trying to deport back to Iran, where he knows she faces torture and probably stoning to death for her sexual orientation. Can we even begin to imagine what Pegah is going through as she continues to fight to prevent herself being sent back to certain persecution?

LGBT Asylum seekers in THIS country face detention having to deal with homophobia not only from other inmates, but even from those who are paid to detain them. Those who assess their claims may have no understanding of homophobia, and be completely unable to understand the real dimensions of the persecution they face.

We demand that the British Govt

- makes Homophobia and Transphobia *absolute* grounds for asylum.
- that it ensures that immigration and asylum staff receive sexual orientation and gender identity training, just as they receive training to prevent sexism and racism.

And so on this International Day Against Homophobia we are sending out a clear message, and our message is this:

- **that neither homophobia, transphobia, nor any other kind of prejudice, have any place in society today.**

As EU citizens we must maintain the pressure on all EU Govts to respect the human rights of ALL their citizens, in keeping with the European Convention on Human Rights. This impacts on ANYONE in the UK exercising their right to work and travel in the EU, like those from Brighton who travelled to Riga Pride in Latvia last year in order to ensure that Riga Pride 2007 went ahead. Only a week ago, the police in Moldova stood by organised thugs threatened violence against LGBT people who tried and sadly failed to hold a Pride Parade. This is a country seeking membership of the EU, which isn't even adhering to the most basic human rights.

It is, sadly, no surprise that some of the world's most oppressive regimes, like those in Iran, China, continue to harass, abuse and discriminate against their citizens on the basis of their sexuality but that our government here in the UK isn't challenging this *daily* is **totally unacceptable**. HOW can Britain send an effective message that homophobic discrimination against LGBT people is unacceptable if the same British Govt is forcing LGBT asylum seekers back to countries which they KNOW retain execution and torture for LGBT people.

It's true, of course, that there have been improvements here in the UK, thanks to the work and struggle of LGBT people themselves but hard-won battles can be over-turned – and we **cannot** forget that the new Tory Mayor of London has called gay marriages a '*ludicrous parody of the real thing*'.

It's time for a renewed campaign to persuade our government to take human rights seriously – and to make stamping out all forms of discrimination a bedrock of British foreign policy. To that end, I will be writing to foreign secretary David Milliband with practical suggestions of how we can support Pride events across Europe.

I am delighted to be able to mark another IDAHO here in Brighton, and to celebrate diversity with one of the most vibrant and diverse LGBT communities in the world.