

**EI-PSI Sexual Diversity Forum
July 18 and 19, 2011
Cape Town, South Africa**

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

— Nelson Mandela

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

— Nelson Mandela

It was on Nelson Mandela's 93rd birthday that 150 delegates from 45 countries around the world gathered in Cape Town, South Africa for a two-day forum on sexual diversity, organised jointly by two global union federations: Education International (EI) and Public Services International (PSI). This was the third joint LGBT forum for EI and PSI, and was billed as the largest LGBT event on the African continent.

It was an honour to be welcomed to South Africa, a country where the people's struggle for freedom and equality has truly made history. Today, South Africa's Constitution is one of the bravest in the world when it comes to protecting human rights, including the rights of the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender communities. It was South Africa that also led the way to the adoption of the historic United Nations resolution on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in June 2011.

Co-Chaired by Sister Junéia Batista (FETAM, Brazil, PSI) and Brother Bob Chase (National Education Association, USA, EI), delegates heard from a number of union and civil society activists from South Africa and other regions around the globe.

Delegates recognized that the protection of LGBT rights exist in many parts of the world, at least on paper and in law, but these rights remain fragile. For example, two men can happily marry in the Netherlands and be chased from their home by a hostile community. Bullying and gay-bashing in schools is all too common in the United States and Canada. In South Africa, lesbians are subjected to so-called "corrective rape" by men as a result of their love for women. There are many other examples to illustrate that hate crimes, violence and discrimination are still a stark reality for LGBT persons in all parts of the world.

The struggle for LGBT rights also continues within the trade union movement and its member organizations, but there was an acknowledgement that we are moving forward. There are more and more opportunities to integrate LGBT issues and rights into our broader union agendas, including in collective bargaining. Increasingly, spaces are being created for LGBT union members to come together, strategize, share victories and discuss our issues. More union leaders and activists are speaking openly about LGBT rights as workers rights and human rights, including in countries where the legal and social protection of LGBT members is tenuous at best. Training and education increasingly includes LGBT issues and rights.

There was an overall recognition of the diversity of the LGBT communities – as reflected in the title of the forum -- and that the trade union movement needs to do more to make the “Ts” in our LGBT advocacy work (Transgendered, Transitioning) more visible and tangible ways.

Delegates recognized that moving forward on LGBT issues requires tackling difficult questions. How seriously are commitments to LGBT rights taken in our organisations, as long as the discussions take place in diversity forums versus the main plenary? How and when do we mainstream LGBT issues into the broader union agendas? For many delegates, mainstreaming needs to be a priority, and the presence of many non-LGBT members at this Forum was an indicator of its success.

The global political context in which we are waging this struggle for LGBT rights is not an easy one. We are all living in a post-financial crisis world where income is moving from wages to profit, and quality public services, including education, are being slashed in the name of debt reduction and saving for future generations. Inequalities and the class (not classroom!) gap are growing. The rights of minorities, including LGBT members, are at risk. But delegates strongly agreed that the rights of LGBT members can never be fought at the expense of any other social, economic and human rights. We can never accept a hierarchy of inequalities and rights, where some take precedence over others. As our trade union mantra so rightly goes, *an injury to one is an injury to all*. And in the same vein, building allies with civil society – LGBT activists, anti-poverty organizations, women’s groups, for example – is critical to our collective successes.

Education is critical to our ability to promote and advance our rights. It is, in Mandela’s words, the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world. Integrating LGBT issues in school curricula and in classrooms will go a long way to achieving LGBT rights and to ensuring that our future generations do not have to wage the same struggles.

Delegates ended the forum by adopting recommendations to the PSI and EI Executive Boards in view of moving forward on LGBT issues within our movement, including:

- pursuing opportunities for interventions with international agencies, including the United Nations and the International Labour Organization,
- creating and building alliances with civil society organizations,
- fully integrating sexual diversity in the Quality Public Services Action Now campaign being led by the Council of Global Unions (which brings together the global union federations from various sectors),
- establishing mechanisms and tools for networking and information sharing among affiliates
- establishing a joint Steering Committee to assist with the follow-up from this Forum and to support the next joint forum to happen within three years.

AMADLA!
AWE THU!

(power to the people!)