

TLF SHARE COLLECTIVE INC.
Sexuality, Health and Rights Educators

A Position Paper Supporting the Passage of the Anti-Discrimination Bill

The Anti-Discrimination Bill – Senate Bill number 1738, in particular – reduces homophobia. Its passage and eventual enactment will reduce acts of discrimination and social exclusion exacted among Filipinos who are lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT's). This legislation shall be a very valuable contribution in enabling a healthy, just and humane society for ALL Filipinos. It shall aid in transforming our society from the social violence of discrimination to one that fully recognizes, respects and upholds human dignity regardless of perceived or actual sexual orientation and gender identities among its citizens.

We are members of TLF Sexuality, Health and Rights Educators Collective, an organization of gay men who are community educators, trainers and advocates working for the promotion of human rights among LGBT's as well as work with men who have sex with men (MSM) for the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV or the virus that causes AIDS. We are a civil society member of the Philippine National AIDS Council (PNAC), the multi-sector body empowered by Republic Act 8504 to oversee the integrated and comprehensive country response to HIV/AIDS. We represent MSM communities, considered as one of the most-at-risk populations for HIV/AIDS.

In our work, we facilitate development of behavior and support systems that enable individuals and communities to protect them selves from harm, to prevent them selves from becoming vulnerable to health risks. When homophobia is minimized, gay men, bisexuals and other MSM are less likely to hide or deny their gender identities. Enabling them to come out from society's proverbial shadows, health promotion efforts like our organization's (and even the government's own health programs) become more accessible, their social and economic needs are better met, their potentials to contribute to community and national development are maximized.

Currently, this is not the scenario. Delivering health promotion programs for gay men, bisexuals and other MSM remain to be one of the most daunting. Learning to prevent consequences of risky sexual activity and enabling them to seek for appropriate health information and services fall below targets set by the Department of Health and the PNAC. Unprotected male-to-male sexual behavior accounts for over 20 percent of HIV infections, or based on the most recent update on the country's HIV/AIDS Registry, that would be almost 600 cases. New cases have been increasing annually, and more worryingly, it is now at its fastest rate in 10 years.

Reduced homophobia helps in addressing a variety of issues, the HIV/AIDS epidemic included. Together with other United Nations member-states, the

Philippines has committed that by year 2010 we have moved towards achieving universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support for people at risk for, already infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In the last UN special session reviewing gains toward this commitment, many HIV prevention efforts, including the Philippines' own, have failed to sufficiently reach gay men, bisexuals, transgenders and other MSM. Upon renewal of commitments, the chief of the UN agency on AIDS have once again advocated resolving homophobia as this being one of the "fundamental drivers" of the worldwide pandemic. He recognized that by reducing homosexual stigma and preventing discrimination among LGBT persons will help curb the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The country's HIV/AIDS epidemic, currently almost 3,000 confirmed cases, representing what could already be up to 10,000 people living with HIV/AIDS, is now classified as hidden and growing. Arresting homophobia as a fundamental driver of the epidemic will be of great significance in finally controlling and reversing this ravaging trend. And more importantly, we believe, resolving stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, will give redress for those who have suffered, those who are presently suffering, and those who will suffer in the future. We believe that a law preventing discrimination among LGBT persons will do these. We look forward to the day that no Filipino citizen shall be unjustly and inhumanely restricted from full participation in society on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, all under the protective and empowering law of the land.

9 August 2006, Makati City, Philippines

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