

# IGLHRC

## Lesbians and Economic Discrimination Report - January 2006

IGLHRC and its partners in **Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras** and **Mexico** completed "*Unnatural, "Unsuitable," Unemployed!: Lesbians and Workplace Discrimination in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, and Mexico.*" The report was released in January 2006 at the Hemispheric Social Forum in Venezuela. Representatives from all of the partner organizations – Marina Bernal, from Artemisa (Mexico); Indyra Mendoza from Cattrachas (Honduras); Yngrid Guzman from Simbiosis (Bolivia); Jurema Werneck from Criola (Brazil) and Elizabeth Castillo from Red Nosotras LGBT (Colombia) – as well as IGLHRC staff were present at the launch event. There were also representatives from the union movement in Mexico and Colombia and from the feminist and women's movements in Bolivia and Honduras. National level launches will follow, with extensive advocacy and public education. In April 2006, the report was launched during the Brazilian Social Forum. There were 200 attendees during this event, including representatives from the Black, Lesbian, Feminist movements as well as trade unionists from different parts of Brazil. The report started discussion around the intersections between racism, discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender. The Colombia and Honduras launches are scheduled for June, and the Mexico launch is planned for August.

The report offers the following picture of discrimination in the workplace:

- Lesbian workers are vulnerable to invasions of their privacy both outside and inside the workplace, constituting a violation of their right to privacy.
- The reasons given for dismissing lesbian workers tend to be based on prejudices, such as the belief that lesbians represent a danger to coworkers' morality and to the prestige of the company.
- With the exception of certain cases, dismissed lesbian workers generally do not dispute the dismissal, but rather accept it and seek new employment. In their new jobs, they take extra precautions not be "outed." The absence of legal protection—and, in certain societies, the explicit and implicit condemnation of lesbianism—contributes to this forced silence, which in turn allows the abuse to continue because employers know they can commit such abuse unpunished.

The report further notes the particular difficulties faced by lesbians of African descent, indigenous lesbians, and both younger and older lesbian workers in these Latin American countries. At the same time, the experiences recounted in the report show that when lesbians dare to demand their rights, presenting their sexual preference not as a reason for shame, but as another feature of their personality, they can often achieve a positive result. The report offers both general and country-specific recommendations to address the extensive economic discrimination faced by lesbian and bisexual women in the region, and seeks to encourage further research as well.

The Mexico portion of the report has already been included in a Shadow Report submitted to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by a Mexican women's NGO this year.