

Latin American Transgender Training Institute Demands Human Rights

OIA Newsdesk

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina - Responding to the needs of Latin American and Caribbean transgender and intersex individuals, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission convened the first-ever Transgender and Intersex Training Institute to help plan for the future of the trans and intersex movements in LAC.

The two-week training institute took place in Cordoba, Argentina in October, where a seven-member coordinating team and 19 activists and advocates from 14 countries trained together in the areas of human rights, transgender and intersex politics and activism, and organizational development. The participants shared experiences, successes, failures, and strategies to ensure full and equal social and political rights for trans and intersex individuals.

At the end of the program, participants issued an eight-point statement "La Falda Declaration" to serve as guiding principles for working on trans and intersex issues throughout LAC. By signing the statement, the group declared to defend the right of all trans and intersex people to fully enjoy fundamental human rights; affirm the need to collectively build positive cultural representations of trans and intersex communities and individuals; demand protection for trans and intersex activists as human rights defenders; and commit to fight together against violence.

"This meeting was a historic step for the trans and intersex communities in Latin America and the Caribbean," said Alejandra Sarda, program coordinator for IGLHRC's Buenos Aires office for LAC. "The Institute can help form an intra-regional network for building the capacity of trans and intersex activists and the organizations for which they work."

Sarda said even though these activists have worked individually on trans and intersex issues for years, many had never come face-to-face with other LAC activists working on the same issues. The training institute allowed them to develop a fuller and more effective vision that will empower them to move forward, Sarda said.

"This Institute was a key to open doors, to free ourselves from censorship, from the invisibility in which many times our bodies and identities have been placed by society," said Dalia Daniela Romero, a participant from Colombia.

Trans and intersex individuals are particularly vulnerable to abuse, violence, discrimination, harassment, torture, economic discrimination, arbitrary arrest and detention, and other human rights violations, which are over-looked and often perpetrated by the police and other government officials.

The 7th Annual Transgender Day of Remembrance on Nov. 20, 2005 served to memorialize those killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. In 2004, IGLHRC documented 71 murders of LGBT people, including murders that were specifically targeted at trans people in Chile, Brazil, Honduras, Argentina, Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

In Latin America and throughout the Caribbean, there are few laws that provide protection from discrimination for trans and intersex people. Laws in a number of countries prohibit or restrict access to sex reassignment surgery, and many countries have public laws that prohibit cross-dressing. To make matters worse, trans organizations, such as ALITT, one of the main trans organizations in Argentina, are denied official legal recognition and suffer from an increased lack of funding.

"To acknowledge each other's existences, to learn how trans people live in other countries, those have been the first building rocks for creating a trans movement with its own agenda that is also able to discuss and exchange with other movements," said Andres Rivera, an attendee from Chile who attended the Cordoba meeting. [11/28/05]

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