

Torture based on sexual identity -- an unacknowledged global shame

Tortured, ill-treated, sexually assaulted, forcibly subjected to medical or psychiatric treatment, forced to flee their home countries in terror -- the world over, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are at particular risk of human rights violations because of their sexual identity, Amnesty International said today.

In a new report launched today the organization describes the plight of the thousands of people who are tortured and ill-treated because their real or perceived sexuality is seen as threatening social order. The report includes documented examples from some 30 countries, but the full extent of the problem is undoubtedly much larger. In over 70 countries same-sex relations are considered a crime, and in some instances they incur the death penalty.

"Despite being a widespread occurrence across continents and cultures, the torture and ill-treatment suffered by LGBT people is surrounded by a conspiracy of silence," Amnesty International said, stressing that this is due to the social stigma often attached to homosexuality and transsexuality.

Generalised tolerance of abuses against LGBT people, fear of retaliation and reluctance by the victims to gain exposure, are some of the factors contributing to this silence. Incidents of sexual identity-based ill-treatment remain largely unreported and under investigated, and those responsible are seldom brought to justice.

Alongside the heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment LGBT people run at the hands of state agents in police stations and prisons, they are also vulnerable to physical and psychological violence -- often amounting to torture -- in the community and even in the family. The prevalence of sexism and homophobia in society means that lesbians are at particular risk of abuse, including being forced into marriage or sexual relationships with men.

"While some governments take an active role in fuelling homophobic violence in society through inflammatory statements and institutionalised discrimination, many more share responsibility for it through lack of action," Amnesty International said.

"To combat this phenomenon, a clear message must come from the authorities -- the torture and ill-treatment of people on the basis of their sexual orientation cannot be tolerated, all instances of it will be properly investigated and those responsible brought to justice," the organization continued.

"Discrimination -- be it based on sexual identity, gender, race, ethnicity or any other factor -- provides a very fertile ground for the persistence and proliferation of torture," Amnesty International said.

"Fighting torture based on sexual identity is an integral part of the overall struggle towards a truly torture-free world," added the organization, whose million-strong worldwide membership is carrying out a global campaign to eradicate torture and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International supports the efforts of the many movements which have emerged throughout the world to break the wall of silence surrounding human rights violations against LGBT people.

The organization also welcomed the recent initiative by the special mechanisms of the UN Commission on Human Rights -- including the Special Rapporteur on Torture -- to encourage the submission of information on human rights abuses related to sexual identity. "However, UN human rights bodies should give more attention to LGBT issues," Amnesty International said.

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www.stoptorture.org

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