

Speech of the deputy mayor Frits Huffnagel at the International Lesbian and Gay Association, ILGA, Malta, 31/10/2009

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real honour for me to address this distinguished international gathering of the International Lesbian and Gay Association.

In the endeavour to achieve equal rights, we are making progress. So let's count our blessings. But... there is also still a lot to be done.

The statement that was presented in the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York in December - now almost a year ago - was a milestone. At the initiative of France and the Netherlands, the United Nations, for the first time in its history, spoke of equal rights for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. By now nearly 70 countries have put their signature to the statement. And thanks to the election of President Barack Obama, the United States will do so as well.

It is precisely this signature that is of such significance. The stance of the United States, after all, serves as an example to many countries in the world. President Obama is thus showing what he means by 'the audacity of hope' in the field of equal rights for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people.

And by the way, only a few weeks ago, President Obama said he will withdraw the so-called 'don't ask, don't tell' army law. That's great news!

Ladies and gentlemen, there are even more positive things to report.

More and more countries are allowing same sex couples to marry legally. The Netherlands was the first country to decide to do so and on 1 April 2001 the mayor of Amsterdam conducted the first marriage ceremony between four same-sex couples. Meanwhile Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway and the American state of Massachusetts have followed suit. And they will be joined by more countries. Allowing same sex marriage is a fine demonstration that equal rights are being honoured. And no, there is no obligation to marry, but there should be a right!

More and more countries are admitting that gay rights are simply human rights. Actually there are no gay rights. Just as there are no rights for women or rights for blacks. Dr. Martin Luther King's movement fought for civil rights, not for black rights. Countries that say they respect human rights must also respect the fact that gay people have the same rights as everyone else. That must be clear in the entire international community.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very proud to announce that next year the ILGA conference will take place in The Hague. The Hague, the city I represent, is very glad and honoured to host this conference.

As the international city of peace and justice, The Hague is a symbol of the struggle for human rights, of the "equal and unalienable rights of all members of the human family" as the United Nations puts it.

This is why your choice of The Hague as the place for your conference next year is so appropriate. The Hague is the international city of peace and justice. The Hague is a city that is home to international tribunals where judgement is given in cases of serious conflict, as in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. A city that offers hope to millions of people - the hope that crimes of which they are the victims will not go unpunished. The Peace Palace, home of the International Court of Justice has a special symbolic significance. It is the symbol of international law. The symbol of the international fight for human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I said earlier, we have achieved a lot, and yet, there is still a lot to be done.

In many countries gay people are persecuted, discriminated against and threatened with violence. And threatened, too, by the police, as we saw in Moscow at the demonstration on the day of the Eurovision Song Contest. In many countries homosexuality is a criminal offence - in some countries the death penalty applies. We have to fight this. Because love between two people can never be a crime.

We are not just talking about the battle against discriminating laws. Even in countries where legally everything is sorted out, we still have to properly safeguard the heritage of the generations before us. We must not throw away what they have achieved. For in those countries we often find that gay people may be tolerated but that is something different to them being accepted.

In the Netherlands there are schools that prefer not to employ gay teachers. There are parents that say they hope their child won't be gay. There are young people who use the word 'homo' as a swear word.

It seems that equal rights are not something that you can sort out just by legislation alone.

Next year at the conference in The Hague, we will be paying strong attention to the 'Gay Straight Alliance' at schools, where teachers and students take initiatives to provide a safe and supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth and their straight allies.

And, when you will be participating in the conference next year, you can visit, right in the middle of our city, the monument to the worldwide rights of gay people. It is a metal ribbon with halfway a knot and with three colours flowing into each other: blue, green and pink.

The blue is the basis for awareness.
Green is the colour of the community.
The knot signifies the conflict.

And the pink end of the ribbon, pointing proudly upwards, stands for liberation. The form and colour of the monument thus constitute a single symbol, the symbol of a self-aware homosexual life. That is what all gay men, lesbians and transgender people in the world wish for.

And it is not only a wish or a dream. I don't want to be tolerated, I want to be accepted, and that's worth fighting for.

Thank you for listening and I hope I will see you all, next year in the international city of peace and justice. You are most welcome in The Hague.

Thank you.