



Dear friends from all across Europe, Central Asia and the World,

I feel privileged and honoured to be able to welcome you, on behalf of the team of Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), to Warsaw for the ILGA-Europe Conference 2017.

The history of Poland is rich in struggles and divisions and, in effect, Warsaw itself has been rebuilt many times over the years. Rebuilt by people who have overcome wars, occupations, partitions, martial law, who fought for democracy and freedom, and who were always looking towards a better world and a better future. This historical heritage is still visible on so many levels – from architecture, commemoration sites and culture, to the movement that today is growing vibrantly in spite of oppressive political circumstances. This year you will be visiting a country where major political forces strive to divide the society, and target non-governmental organisations and human rights they stand for. And yet are unsuccessful, because a large portion of the society still believes in the values on which democratic Poland was formed almost 30 years ago: freedom, equality, solidarity.

We believe that the Conference will contribute to the struggle for these values. The event comes to Warsaw at a perfect time - two years after a nationalist government came into power and began radicalising the public discourse, and two years before the next vital elections. We are convinced that your presence will bring much needed attention to the situation of LGBTI people in Poland and encourage political commitments.

We are looking forward to hosting you for these few days in November when we will face the difficult tasks this wide European movement has taken upon itself. The “Communities Mobilising, Movements Rising” conference theme will allow us to take a closer look at what threats and opportunities arise in times of growing insecurities. Through panels, workshops and discussions we hope to be able to see more clearly how we can, in the upcoming years, contribute to an open and just society:

- how to foster the connections between our LGBTI identities and our cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, beliefs, work, experiences, families and other backgrounds,
- how to introduce change to the wider society and, at the same time, enable and empower those whom we have so far left behind,
- how to mobilise, organise, and rise as a movement, and in that what attention do we pay to creating space for others,
- how is our work contributing to building bridges, fostering understanding and cooperating with people with whom we, so far, have not had mutual interests with?

The Conference venue is located near the heart of what used to be the Warsaw Ghetto. This historical site not only is a proof of what happens when prejudice and hate take over, but also an evidence of the unprecedented role fear and indifference play in oppression. Our history teaches us that to achieve real change we need to stand together. We need to bring on board LGBTI people, people of faith, people of colour, allies, politicians, trade unions, media and many, many more. We need to be one community and one movement. We need to mobilise. We need to rise to achieve freedom, equality and dignity for all.

A. Chaber