

Opening remarks by H.E. Alphons Hennekens
on the occasion IDAHOT-cocktail of 17 May 2016

Dear guests, friends and colleagues,

We have no Chief Guest; you're all my chief guest this evening!

I welcome you all to this evening's celebration at my Residence of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2016. In short, IDAHOT 2016. IDAHOT is an annual event and is celebrated this year in 132 countries worldwide. It aims at raising awareness of LGBTI rights violations and at stimulating interest in LGBTI rights work worldwide.

In many European and Latin American countries IDAHOT is celebrated with public events like large-scale street parades, festivals, arts and culture-based events, colored balloon releases, dance flash mobs, musical events, and performance and street art. In the Netherlands, IDAHOT Netherlands is celebrating and supporting the day online, through social media and their website. The group will support the efforts of Dutch LGBTI campaigns and will also be running a competition to win tickets for the country's national pride event later this year.

In Rotterdam, My LGBTI Life is hosting a number of events in celebration of the day as well as panel discussions on issues related to the LGBTI community. There will also be an after party featuring a well-known Dutch DJ. In The Hague, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has hosted the rainbow flag together with the Chairperson of COC Netherlands, at the main entrance of the Ministry. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport will do this as well.

This afternoon, my Ministry's internal LGBTI staff network 'Out There' will organize the event 'How is Life Out There?'. The HR Director of my Ministry will chair a panel discussion on the acceptance of LGBTI people in the workplace, the role of management, and being posted abroad with a same-sex partner. This evening, the documentary film 'Out and About' - produced by Human Rights in the Picture and funded by my Ministry - will premiere in The Hague. The documentary features parents of LGBTI people, and offers a very humane and personal perspective on the struggle for equal rights for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, in Uganda and in some countries around the world, sexual and gender diversities are still characterized as mental health problems. Even in more progressive places, this assumption, albeit unconscious, still lies at the root of many barriers to full equality for LGBTI people.

To give you a bit of background, in the late 19th Century scientists started developing theories around sexual identity and behaviour. Homosexuality, and later gender variance, was to be defined as the result of chemical imbalances or mental deficiencies. The psychology arguments have since then been used towards the persecution of sexual and gender minorities. The connection between mental illness and homosexuality became so influential, that it enabled the rise of state-led criminalization crusades against same-sex behaviour. Specifically, the "psychiatric" argument has been used for justifying psychiatric "treatments" of LGBTI individuals, with the aim of 'reforming' or 'curing' them from their disease.

There is nevertheless a growing international consensus moving away from this position on sexual orientation and gender identity. The World Health Organization (WHO) published on May 17th 1990 a revised version of the International Classification of Diseases Manual, in which homosexuality was not considered a mental disease any longer. This is the reason why, every year since 2004, the IDAHOT is celebrated worldwide on May 17th. In a landmark special statement earlier this year, the World

Psychiatric Association has strongly condemned any attempt to conflate homosexuality with a mental disorder

However, it is still an obstacle to overcoming negative attitudes, stereotypes, and the multiple barriers for the realization of LGBTI people's most fundamental human rights. Therefore, we remain concerned that homosexuality in 75 countries is still a crime and in 7 countries punishable by death. In too many countries LGBTI people are still treated as second-class citizens and in particular transgender and lesbian women are at risk of violence.

Legal and policy reforms are needed to remove discriminatory laws and protect LGBTI persons from violence and discrimination. But these will not be effective or sufficient on their own while outdated medical classifications persist. These classifications should be reformed. States should adopt measures to prevent, investigate and prosecute all forms of forced, coercive and otherwise involuntary treatments and procedures on LGBTI persons. They should further ensure the provision of health services based on informed consent and free from stigma, pathologization and discrimination, including gender affirming procedures for trans people

In spite of the progress made in many countries, the mental illness argument remains a major driver to maintain belief systems that LGBTI people can't be good parents, that discrimination in certain professions is acceptable, that the mental development of children can be affected by LGBTI people, etc.

However, today is also an occasion to celebrate, to encourage and inspire each other to move forwards and to address the still many challenges ahead, here in Uganda but also in the Netherlands.

In the annual Rainbow Map published recently by the International lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex Association, Malta scores 1st. The Netherlands has dropped unfortunately from the 7th to the 11th place. Reasons for our lagging behind are that we still have not explicitly included gender identity as a prohibited ground of discrimination in our Equal Treatment Law; neither do we have a specific policy or legislation when it comes to intersex. So, there's still work to do in the Netherlands.

According to their latest LGBTI monitor published on 12 May, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research concluded that social acceptance of LGBTI people in The Netherlands continues to increase, also among religious communities. And that's positive news.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, a group of UN human rights experts, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe urge Governments worldwide to reform medical classifications and to adopt measures to prevent all forms of forced treatments and procedures on LGBTI persons.

Therefore, as I conclude, ladies and gentlemen, let's continue our work together, advocating for equal rights for LGTBI people worldwide, Uganda included. The Netherlands Government has five clear priorities to achieve these equal rights: fight discrimination, support activists, decriminalization, end violence and enhance international leadership.

The Netherlands Embassy is committed to continue supporting you in your commendable and great efforts to achieve equal rights for LGTBI people here in Uganda.

I once again thank you for honouring our invitation this evening and welcome you to enjoy the rest of it.