

International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia – IDAHOT

16th of May 2014

Honourable guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and an immense pleasure to welcome you tonight at the Alliance Française of Johannesburg, to celebrate the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia.

This day is now in its 9th edition and has become a major annual moment for action in defence of the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons. This day, recognised officially by 10 states and the European Parliament commemorates the decision to remove homosexuality from the International classification of disease of the World Health Organization. It celebrates the universality of human rights, gender and sexual diversities, and provides a vital contribution to LGBTI activists to pursue their actions in hostile contexts.

Nevertheless, 81 countries still criminalise same-sex relationships and gender identity. Sexual orientation continues to be used as a pretext for serious human rights violations.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons are subject to persecution, discrimination, ill-treatment and extreme forms of violence. This means that millions of homosexual and bisexual persons live in a constant state of fear and face public stigmatization, repression, attack and murder. This situation is unacceptable and is incompatible with international human rights law

I would like to re-affirm, tonight, that France is strongly mobilized in the protection of LGBTI persons against discrimination and hate crimes.

At an international level, France is committed to the universal decriminalisation of homosexuality and has also welcomed the 17/19 Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council, a text proposed by South African High Commissioner Navi Pillay that explicitly states equality regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

France also supports civil society initiatives and in 2008, created the Human rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Support Fund. Last year France, has also made progress, with regards to its own legislation, granting same-sex couples the right to marry and to jointly adopt children.

In South Africa, the French Embassy, through the Civil Society Development Fund, has notably supported GALA - Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action - and Luleki Sizwe.

These organisations are in the task team for the National Intervention Strategy publicly launched by Justice Minister Jeff Radebe last month. This new national intervention will help in developing programmes, improving the response of the criminal justice system, and strengthening the capacity of state and civil society institutions in counselling, communication and prevention.

As much as IDAHOT is a day against violence and oppression, it is also a day to promote art, freedom of expression, diversity and acceptance.

Tonight, we are here to celebrate this freedom and the documentaries that you are going to watch are visible projects that voice discrimination and injustices towards lesbians:

Digital short stories reflect on the life of 12 lesbian women largely from Alexandra Township in Johannesburg. Storytelling reveals the experiences of discrimination and violence in this collective of women.

Foot for love is the story of Thokozani FC, a soccer team funded by photographer and activist Zanele Muholi following the murder in 2007 of Thokozani Qwabe, a 23 year old woman who was raped and killed because of her sexual expression. Thokozani FC is a place where lesbians from the township of Umlazi, threatened by hate crime can find a shelter and affirm their identity.

In this two documentaries produced by the French association “les Dégommeuses”, Thokozani FC’s partner since 2012, sport comes out against homophobia.

Before I finish I would like to remind you that on Sunday, Bayana Bayana, the South African women's football team will play against the Ghanaian Black Queens at Dobsonville Stadium in Soweto. It is fitting to pay tribute to Eudy Simelane, Banyana Banyana’s team leader, who was brutally raped and murdered in 2008.

I wish you all a good projection, fruitful debates and continuing advocacy for the advancement of human rights.