

Gay faith leaders denounce Vatican

Dec. 10, 2008

Faith program directors from the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, Human Rights Campaign, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and National Black Justice Coalition today issued a joint protest over the Vatican's recent decision to oppose an initiative to decriminalize homosexuality. Advocates are pushing the U.S. State Department to support the initiative and urging media to cover this life and death concern.

The following joint statement was issued on United Nations Human Rights Day and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"For far too long people around the world have been ostracized, imprisoned, tortured and denied basic rights to housing, health care and employment simply because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). In more than 70 countries people can be imprisoned for homosexuality and in several countries it is a crime punishable by death.

"This is why the French government, backed by 27 European Union nations, put forward a proposal, on Human Rights Day to recognize that LGBT rights are human rights and to decriminalize homosexuality. Such a statement simply affirms the most basic of rights for LGBT people: that they be allowed to live in dignity and safety. As faith leaders who work every day with LGBT people who feel the stigma of discrimination, this U.N. initiative speaks to our core belief that we show our love for God when we care for our neighbors, particularly those who are shunned and marginalized.

"As faith leaders we were shocked by Vatican opposition to this proposed initiative. By refusing to sign a basic statement opposing inhumane treatment of LGBT people, the Vatican is sending a message that violence and human rights abuses against LGBT people are acceptable. Most Catholics, and indeed most Catholic teachings, tell us that all people are entitled to live with basic human dignity without the threat of violence. The Catholics we know believe that Scripture asks us to be our brother and our sister's keeper. Many are speaking out against this immoral stance in the name of religion.

"Compounding the Vatican's opposition is the inaction to date of the government of the United States. As faith leaders and citizens of the United States, we call on the U.S. government to join the 50 countries throughout the world that have officially supported this U.N. proposal.

"We urge U.S. leaders to stand against discrimination. It is time to let the teachings of the world's great religions guide us toward justice rather than encouraging prejudice, fear and violence. It is time for the U.S. to stand as a moral leader for LGBT people and to help create a more just world for all of us."

Statement by the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Institute for Welcoming Resources and faith work director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; Harry Knox, director of Religion and Faith Program of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation; Ann Craig, director of Religion, Faith and Values Program of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; and Sylvia Rhue, Ph.D., director of Religious Affairs of the National Black Justice Coalition.