

THE RUSSIAN LGBT NETWORK 2012-2014 STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction

Russian LGBT Network (here – the Network) was created in 2006. At present, it is the largest LGBT organization in Russia. The Network consists of individual and collective participants that work in more than 20 regions of Russia.

Throughout our operation history, we won recognition of the necessity to protect LGBT rights by leading Russian human rights organizations; we established stable contact with federal authorities (including Commissioner for Human Rights in the RF and the RF Presidential Council for Human Rights); we conduct monitoring of hate crimes and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SO and GI). Legal cases regarding the LGBT right to organizations, transgender rights, including cases on parental rights, documents and name change.

The Network succeeded in getting measures to eliminate discrimination based on SO and GI in the Recommendations for Russia (the U.N. Human Rights Committee, 2009; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) within the Council of Europe, 2010; the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2011). We initiated discussion of LGBT rights observance within communication of the Council of Europe and the E.U. with Russia.

Every year, around 100 regional LGBT activists undergo training in strategy and tactics of LGBT organizing and organizational management. We also provide LGBT organizers with psychological help and legal support on the permanent basis regarding NGO registration and human rights advocates' protection.

In 2007-2011, 13 national information campaigns in support of LGBT equality were organized. For example, almost 1,000 individuals in 40 regions of Russia participated in the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia throughout the period from 2009 to 2011.

We run a toll-free national hotline providing assistance of qualified lawyers and psychologists. High-quality materials on LGBT legal and social matters are being released.

Throughout the past three years, regular seminars on legal and social aspects of SO and GI for human rights advocates, health care workers, psychologists, and politicians have been conducted both in specific regions and on the national level.

The highest body of the Network is its annual conference that elects the Board, Chairperson, and Controller. In between the conferences, the Board acts as a governing collegiate body. The Board approves the Network's annual plan and budget and controls their implementation. Chairperson represents the Network in legal communications with organizations in the Russian Federation and abroad, manages the Network's staff and is in charge of other executive management matters that are not part of the Board's exclusive competence. Controller exercises control over observance of the governing bodies' decisions and financial and operational activities of the Network.

The Network operates according to the Strategic Plan that is adopted by the Conference once in three years. Strategic Plan defines the primary course for organizational development in the next three years. It is based on analysis of internal and external factors, social, economic and political tendencies in Russia and in the world. All participants of the organization can take part in designing its strategic plan, and polls, calls for proposals, and discussions are held to facilitate involvement.

In 2009-2011, the Russian LGBT Network worked in compliance with the Main Directions in the Strategy of LGBT Activism Development in Russia, a document that was adopted by the Conference in 2008. This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Conference in November, 2011, and it indicates the main course of development for 2012-2014.

Conditions that We Work In

Russia is currently experiencing a difficult and contradictory transition into a modern society seeking harmonious co-existence of people with different identities, views, and cultural characteristics, who are united by pursuit of happiness. Only a society like this can guarantee today peace and freedom in personal development. Pursuit of this social ideal is impossible without elimination of patriarchal prejudice against people that differ from the majority in their sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in Russia are regularly experiencing violence and discrimination because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Homicide, battery, and abasement of human dignity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are common and often silenced. According to the research conducted by the Russian LGBT Network in 2010, as much as one third of gays and lesbians became victims of physical violence because of their SO and GI. 26% attempted suicide because of this hostility. Even more common are cases of psychological abuse, threatening, and blackmailing. This situation is aggravated by impunity of hate speech – public statements that incite hate and hostility, as well as calls for violence and discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Due to the non-existence of a legal sex-change procedure, transsexuals are deprived of basic social guarantees and opportunity to receive quality health care. Most transsexuals in Russia experience problems with obtaining documents, confirming a gender identity that this individual identifies with. Transsexuals' right to social welfare benefits is barely observed in Russia, because there is no financial support available from public funds for medical expenses, associated with transsexuality.

These and numerous other problems of the LGBT community are often neglected by the Russian government on the law- and policy-making levels. Moreover, every time when the government resorts to populist rhetoric in its policies, symptoms of homophobia and transphobia appear in it.

Current legal regulations directed at prevention of hatred and hostility incitement and at protection against hate crimes are not applied regarding cases of homophobic and transphobic hatred and violence against LGBT. Law enforcement authorities explain it by the fact in Russia, LGBT are not legally regarded as a social group.

Russian authorities systematically hinder human rights advocacy and educational activities of NGOs that are attempting to lower the level of homophobia and transphobia in the society. Territorial departments of the Ministry of Justice of the RF systematically exercise the practice of denials in registration to NGOs that were created to protect the rights and legal interests of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. It has become a common practice to ban LGBT public events (rallies, demonstrations, picketing). In some regions bills have been passed that prohibit distribution of information about homosexuality. A number of politicians and activists are actively lobbying the necessity to adopt these laws nationally, on the federal level. Prosecuting LGBT activists, the authorities do not want to have a dialogue on socially important issues regarding violence prevention and elimination of discrimination.

At the same time, only a legitimate and efficient government will be able to provide for and to guarantee observance of human rights without any discrimination. That is why we seek to create the environment for an equal dialogue with the government on the basis of acknowledgement of human dignity, rights and

freedoms of individuals as the highest value, as well as on the basis of the rule of law and constructive criticism.

The source of high hate crimes rate and large number of crimes because of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity lies in high occurrence of all forms of xenophobia, including homophobia and transphobia, within the Russian society. According to the 2010 opinion poll by Levada Center, 74% of respondents hold that gay and lesbian people are amoral or psychologically handicapped. Only 15% responded that homosexuality is equally possible along with heterosexuality. 11% were undecided. 4% of the Russian population think that gay and lesbian people should be exterminated.

The government relies on public opinion in its policies. As long as high levels of homophobia and transphobia remain and there is no agreement in the society regarding equality and human dignity for everyone regardless sexual orientation and gender identity, it is impossible to bring any serious political changes.

We consider the following to be the main reasons of wide proliferation of homophobia and transphobia in the society:

- poor gender and sexual education;
- privacy and lack of organization within the LGBT community;
- intended dissemination of prejudice and hate ideas by a number of organizations.

By long-standing cultural and political traditions of patriarchy, with its characteristic suppression of human sexuality, ideas of everyone's right to free gender and sexual self-identification have not been shaped in the collective consciousness of Russians.

Information about diversity of sexual and gender identities is often perceived through the lens of patriarchal gender stereotypes. Work of individual academics and NGOs on gender education faces political opposition and censorship in the media and academia.

Repressions and stigmatization forced LGBT to constantly conceal their identities and conform. For a long time the sheer idea of the possibility of open self-expression and organized assertion of rights and dignity seemed incredible to the Russian LGBT. Closeness and civic passivity made them vulnerable to discrimination and easy prey for criminals, but also contributed to the distribution of negative myths and stereotypes in the Russian public opinion.

In the past years, the situation in Russia has begun to change. LGBT community is becoming more visible and more socially active. More and more people stop hiding their sexual orientation both within their immediate social circles and the broader society. Various forms of self-organization of the LGBT community become more prevalent: initiative interest groups, voluntary associations. In many regions, representatives of the LGBT community speak out about themselves and their rights, engage in dialogue with the society through public events, campaigns and other civil actions. The emerging LGBT movement interacts with other civic initiatives and becomes a prominent part of the civil society in Russia. Through activities carried out by LGBT organizations, LGBT individuals gain access to professional legal, psychological, medical and social care and relevant information.

However, the level of openness, organization, and civic participation of the LGBT community is still not sufficient for a quality change in public opinion. According to sociologists, only 11% of Russians have openly gay and lesbian people among their acquaintances. LGBT organizations reach out to a small part of the community, and they do not have sufficient resources and skills.

Increase in visibility and activity of the LGBT community in recent years has led to increased homophobic and transphobic rhetoric and direct aggression on the part of some religious and social and political organizations. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church and other religious groups openly advocate the ban of

LGBT organizations, as well as other legal restrictions for open gays and lesbians. Increasingly, LGBT activists have to deal with direct violence on the part of right-wing organizations representatives.

Russian contemporary reality challenges, but also gives opportunities to, all defenders of human rights and dignity, including LGBT-movement activists. We do not require any special rights for any group within the population. We only fight equality for everyone. Discrimination and denial of human dignity based on sexual orientation and gender identity are also an important problem that must be addressed today.

We believe that our professionalism and good management will help to help transform Russia into a modern country that is free of intolerance, violence and discrimination.

Mission

The Russian LGBT Network is an inter-regional non-governmental human rights organization that promotes equal rights and human dignity regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity by bringing together and developing regional initiatives, advocacy (both nationally and internationally) and providing social and legal services.

Our social ideal

External vision: A society that recognizes and respects diversity of identities, attitudes and lifestyles on the basis of common values of peace, nonviolence, and pursuit of happiness. Different people – shared values.

Inner vision: Continually developing stable organization that unites regional initiatives and organizations, that is recognized nationally and internationally as a representative of the interests of the Russian LGBT community, and that is able to achieve social change in the short and long term.

Our values

- Violence is not a method. We believe in common sense and humanity.
- Our knowledge, professionalism and good management can make a difference.
- We are ready for constructive cooperation with government authorities at all levels, as well as for assisting the State in ensuring the rights and freedoms and the preservation of civil peace.
- We do not participate in election campaigns, political campaigning and other activities aimed at achieving and exercising state power. Participants of the Network are involved in political activities exclusively on their own behalf and not allowed to use the name and symbols of the Network in them.
- We will not join any coalitions, unions and other associations with political parties and organizations that run for power.
- We build our relationships with religious organizations on the basis of mutual respect, freedom of conscience and separation of church and state.
- We believe that even the most complex social issues can be resolved through equal dialogue and respect for diversity of opinions and beliefs. References to freedom of religious, political or other opinions cannot justify violence and incitement to violence, discrimination and humiliation.

- We consider homophobia and transphobia to be part of the general xenophobia problem, and we are willing to cooperate with anyone who shares the principles of equality of rights and freedoms, non-discrimination and tolerance.

Strategic goals

To gain recognition and respect of minimum set of rights and freedoms, necessary to uphold human dignity and to further carrying out LGBT human rights activities. We will pursue investigation and punishment of hate speech and hate crimes, as well as recognition and respect of freedom of expression, association and assembly without discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, creation and implementation of a humane and clear procedure for documents change, and ensuring affordability of special health services for transgender people.

To strengthen the capacity, safety and visibility of the community and to get it involved in various forms of civil activism. We will expand availability of varied professional assistance for LGBT individuals regardless of where they live. We will promote emergence and development of new and existing regional LGBT organizations, as well as work for increased involvement of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the LGBT movement and in other areas of civil activism.

To facilitate recognition of the risks social unacceptability of homophobia and transphobia as forms of xenophobia by the society. Attracting attention, initiating discussion, informing and shaping authoritative opinions, we help the community realize the danger and moral unacceptability of homophobia and transphobia.

To ensure organizational stability and quality management of the Network that will be sufficient to achieve its strategic objectives. Development of managerial potential (management professionalization) and transparent structure of the Network, increasing the level of involvement of participants in decision-making and attracting different sources of funding (as a prerequisite of stability of the organization).

Methods

Working with the State

- advocacy campaigns;
- conducting monitoring and other studies of social and legal status of LGBT in Russia, results analysis, preparing reports and presentation of recommendations articulated on the basis of the above-mentioned activities;
- strategic litigation with resort to regional, federal, and international judicial and extrajudicial mechanisms;
- preparation and presentation of alternative reports on the situation of LGBT in Russia for committees of various international organizations (the UNO, Council of Europe, OSCE), that control Russia's implementation of its international obligations on human rights;
- responding to incidents of mass or serious violations of LGBT human rights by organizing our own actions (including public events), as well as attracting international attention to the need for Russia's compliance with its obligations to respect, protect and promote human rights;

- building coalitions, organizing joint activities with other human rights organizations (Russian, foreign, international), with the goal to create conditions ensuring equality and non-discrimination;
- organizing and holding round table discussions, seminars and conferences with guest representatives of the state authorities to discuss issues of social and legal status of LGBT people in Russia and ways to address these problems;
- establishment of direct contacts with representatives of government authorities in Russia in order to provide them with information on the situation of LGBT people in Russia, as well as to offer recommendations for improving this status quo;
- participation in the activities of Human Rights held with representatives of the Russian and foreign government authorities and international organizations.

Working with the society

- seminars, “round tables”, training sessions, etc. for representatives of groups that influence public opinion, as well as for parents and friends of LGBT individuals;
- building coalitions and alliances with human rights organizations and other civic initiatives;
- awareness-raising campaigns for the general population;
- publication of information and training materials for journalists, human rights activists, doctors, social workers, educators and law enforcement agencies, as well as for the general population;
- regular delivery of information about life, problems and needs of the LGBT community to the media;
- monitoring of hate speech in the media;
- influencing professional journalistic community to phase out the use of hate speech against LGBT people;
- assisting research of the LGBT community, homophobia, transphobia and homonegativity, as well as popularizing research findings;
- dissemination of knowledge of child and adolescent sexuality and gender identity within the system of education;
- cooperation with educators to reduce the stigma of homosexual and transgender adolescents and youth in educational institutions;
- promotion of quality works of art of various forms and genres that objectively report on socially significant LGBT issues (exhibitions, books about LGBT, LGBT film festivals, etc.).

Working with the LGBT community

- researching needs of the community (including under-represented groups) and dissemination of research findings;
- providing targeted legal advice on strategic matters;
- remote (phone, email, social networks, etc.) informational, psychological and legal support to the community members;
- campaigns to attract experts to work with LGBT, methodical support and assistance, improving networking for specialists;
- publication and dissemination of educational literature and media materials on legal and socio-psychological issues of self-acceptance (coming out), rights protection and social adaptation, history of the LGBT community and LGBT movement;

- getting the community involved in awareness-raising campaigns;
- informing the community about the work and achievements of the Network;
- development of volunteerism in the Network;
- getting the community involved in public interest campaigns and movements.

Supporting the LGBT movement

- seminars and trainings for action groups and organizations in the areas of strategy and tactics for public interests human rights protection, management of non-governmental organizations, information management and history of LGBT movement;
- advising regional action teams and organizations on their formation and development;
- information, legal and psychological assistance to activists in the regions;
- conferences and seminars to share experiences;
- all-Russian Schools of Leaders of the LGBT movement;
- organization of information exchange through the Network's website and newsletters;
- development, publication and distribution of various methodological materials for activists;
- coordination of national advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns;
- creation and development of a system of rapid reaction to incidents that threaten activists' life and health, as well as the organization's safety.

Organizational development of the Network

- continuous training of the governing bodies and staff;
- filling vacant managerial positions on a competitive basis;
- regular staff evaluation;
- development, implementation and review of job descriptions;
- development of the Network's official website as a communication and fundraising tool;
- creation, implementation and updating of transparent decision-making procedures;
- designing, implementing and updating a transparent system of financial management and internal financial controls;
- diversification of funding sources of the organization;
- regular work of the Conference and Board;
- campaigns and events to attract and retain volunteers;
- development and regular update of service packages for volunteers, supporters and participants of the Network;
- prevention of emotional burnout for volunteers and staff;
- prevention of threats to the physical safety of volunteers and staff, as well as informational and legal security of the organization;
- regular involvement of individual and collective participants of the Network in planning, management and evaluation activities of the Network.