Joint Statement on Trans Advocacy Week at the UN Human Rights Council 35th Session

article, non-discrimination

Sixteen trans and gender diverse activists from fifteen countries across all regions of the world – including Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, North America, the Pacific, and the Caribbean – participated in the first Trans Advocacy Week at the 35th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. This historical event was a joint initiative organized by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTN), Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE), the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), the Swedish Federation for LGBTQ Rights (RFSL), and Transgender Europe (TGEU).

During the week of June 5 – 9, trans activists met for a full day strategic planning meeting; produced and delivered two oral statements commenting on the latest reports of the Special Rapporteur on Health, the Independent Expert of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), and the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions; attended private meetings with Special Procedures and their staff; met with representatives from UNAIDS, the Global Fund, UNHCR, and with the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. They also attended a meeting between the Equal Rights Coalition and civil society organizations. Many of the activists also met with their Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva as well as with other activists working regionally and internationally on human rights issues at the Council.

Manisha's intervention on the right to mental health

Ricky's intervention on violence, discrimination, and legal gender recognition

A key highlight of the week was the groundbreaking panel on Transgender People, Mental Health and Human Rights. Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, the Independent Expert on SOGI issues, and Dr. Dainius P?ras, the Special Rapporteur on Health, presented at the panel, accompanied by the presentations of Viviane Vergueiro and Mauro Cabral Grinspan, and the moderation of Julia Ehrt. After the panel presentations, other participants spoke from the floor.

Video from the side event is available in two parts:

The Trans Advocacy Week was planned after trans activists' participation in the Public Consultation called by the UN Independent Expert on SOGI on January 2017. Some participants in the Trans Advocacy Week, such as Erika Castellanos (Belize) and Ricky Nathanson (Zimbabwe) had already been part of that process. For other participants, such as Viviane Vergueiro (Brasil), Lady Gaga (Papua New Guinea), Yaya Aye Myat (Myanmar) and Fritz von Klein (Ukraine), this was their first time ever at the UN. These participants left excited and committed to UN trans advocacy; Yaya explained her thoughts saying, "I am however pleased to be part of this Trans Advocacy Week and I would like something to happen in the future. Amongst the UN state members, if there is at least 2% of the ambassadors are transgender people then, I would die happily. Am I dreaming too much?"

The organizers are already planning a second Trans Advocacy Week for June 2018 as well as additional engagements within UN spaces during the year. For Mauro Cabral Grinspan, GATE Executive Director, "this initiative shows what can be achieved by trans networks, organizations and networks working together, in spite of how scarce our resource are." Micah Grzywnowicz, International Advocacy Advisor at RFSL noted, "Trans activists and trans issues have never been so visible at the Human Rights Council and UN spaces at large. This has been truly historic week and a start of a larger and sustained engagement with the UN."