

STATEMENT

IM-DEFENSORAS CITES RESPONSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM IN HATE CRIMES AND ATTACKS AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN AMERICA

Mesoamerica, June 25, 2016 - The 750 women human rights defenders in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua who make up the **Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras)** hereby express our outrage, first of all, against the hate crime perpetrated on Sunday, June 12, that took the lives of 49 people in a night spot frequented by the **LGBTTI** community in the city of Orlando, Florida, in the United States.

Nevertheless, in view of efforts by different political, religious and media groups to label the crime as an act of “Islamic terrorism” or an isolated case of individual pathological behavior, we find it necessary to highlight the way in which this abominable attack fits into a pattern of repeated attacks against people belonging to LGBTTI communities, as well as against organizations and individuals engaged in the defense of sexual and reproductive rights (DSSRR) throughout the continent, and especially in countries like Honduras and El Salvador.

So far this year, around 500 gay, lesbian and transexual men and women have been killed on the American continent.¹ One of the most recent victims is René Martínez, a prominent Honduran activist who was tortured and murdered at the beginning of June, thereby joining the list of more than two hundred members of the LGBTTI community killed in Honduras since the 2009 coup de 'etat.

This situation has led the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to issue its “[Report on Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Persons](#)”, (November, 2015), in which, it points to “hate speech” as one of the main causes of such violence.

<<The Inter-American Commission has received information indicating that violence against LGBTI persons is reinforced by the dissemination of “hate speech” directed against this community in different contexts, including public debates, demonstrations against events organized by LGBTI persons such as pride marches, and also through news media and the Internet. Even though it is necessary to research this phenomenon in greater depth, evidence shows that when crimes against LGBTI persons occur, they are frequently preceded by an atmosphere of heightened dehumanization and discrimination>>.

Hate speech is often propagated by fundamentalist groups through the use of temples and altars as well as public news media; such groups also conduct lobbying campaigns to pressure governments to foment policies that restrict human rights. El Salvador is another clear example of the impact of these fundamentalist actors on public policy. Fundamentalists lobby for the total criminalization of abortion, conduct smear campaigns against women human rights defenders, and contribute to the consolidation of a misogynous, heteronormative culture. As is true in Honduras, this translates into alarming rates of femicides and violence against women and the LGBTTTI population, and into attacks against defenders of women’s rights and the right to sexual diversity.

¹ LGBT community asks OAS to stem homophobia, <http://laestrella.com.pa/internacional/america/comunidad-lgbt-pide-frenar-homofobia/23945632>

The recent plenary session of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Santo Domingo set the stage for a virulent new lobbying campaign by fundamentalist lobbies, spurred by statements of OAS President Luis Almagro on the need for the transversalization of the gender issue and the reformulation of policies that restrict the right to abortion in view of the danger posed by the spread of the ZIKA virus.

In this scenario, we of IM-Defensoras believe that it is not enough to appeal to security policies because the cause of such repeated attacks has to do with structural dynamics of our societies that we must overcome and transform. To this end, it is necessary that governments, while respecting freedom of speech, refuse to allow impunity for hate speech and other discourses that seek to restrict the rights of at least half the population -- women and of members of LGBTTI communities.

It is even more intolerable for governments to align themselves with narratives and practices springing from fundamentalist settings, regardless of their religious affiliation, and to take up their demands. This has been the case, for example, in Nicaragua and some states in Mexico, thereby endangering one of the mainstays of democracy: secular states.

AN END TO FUNDAMENTALISMS!
NO MORE HATE CRIMES
YES TO SECULAR STATES
#DefendWHRDs



Nicaraguan Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders