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Fighting Homophobia with the United Nations

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Gay-Straight Alliance Network had the amazing opportunity and honor to attend the first United Nations Consultation on Homophobic Bullying In Educational Institutions. Believing it vital for conversations about issues that directly affect youth to have a youth perspective, GSA Network chose me, a youth activist and Board Member, to represent the organization. I joined LGBT Activists, Ministry of Education officials, UN agency representatives, and others (find the full list [here](#) ^[1]) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from December 6-9, 2011, to address the global issue of homophobic bullying in schools.

Above all, the convening showed me the fundamental differences in legal and cultural frameworks between countries, and where the United States falls in the global picture. There are some countries that provide greater protections for LGBT youth than the United States, and some where the murder and discrimination of LGBT people are blatantly supported by law. It was shocking to hear about countries that disregard international laws, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in persecuting and murdering LGBT people.

It became apparent that LGBT youth need to be protected from homophobic bullying in



institutions by establishing their protection under the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This international law specifies the right of the child to an education, which LGBT youth targeted by homophobic bullying are denied. This is especially true for transgender youth, who frequently are denied an education and are unable to attend educational institutions. We, the participants, agreed upon a [Statement on Homophobic Bullying and Education for All](#) [2], which further explains homophobic bullying in educational institutions as a violation of human rights. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child should compel governments to address homophobic bullying and treat it as a legitimate concern. Other recommendations from the consultation included changes in laws, policies, and government aid.

Participants from the consultation were also given the opportunity to visit a school, a policymaker, or a non-governmental agency that is involved in tackling homophobic bullying. I chose to visit a Brazilian school and spoke to some of the students about their perspectives on their school's climate. An LGBT-identified youth informed me that she felt relatively safe at her school, though bullying still occurs. Other students felt that their school, which is supported by the government of Rio de Janeiro in combating homophobic bullying, was one of the safer schools for LGBT-identified students in Brazil. Rio de Janeiro has taken the lead to combat homophobia in Brazil and has also agreed to implement the recommendations proposed by the consultation.



As the consultation progressed, I realized that safe schools activists cannot ignore the important role of the federal government in ending homophobic bullying in educational institutions. Human rights violations will continue if governments fail to acknowledge and fight discrimination and prejudice against LGBT people in

their respective countries. The United States, which has not ratified the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, must recognize the need to address social inequalities on a federal level, and pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act and the Student Non-Discrimination Act to end homophobic bullying in public schools. With anti-LGBT bullying occurring in our schools, the United States Congress fails to ensure that every youth in the United States has equal access to an education.

The consultation was an important step towards ending anti-LGBT bullying. Now, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will use our recommendations to create a comprehensive research paper listing the appropriate ways for different countries to address homophobic bullying in educational institutions. These efforts will help persuade governments to eventually push for humane and equal treatment of LGBT people. Attending the UN consultation has inspired me to look beyond our legal and cultural framework for tools to eliminate the inhumane treatment of LGBT people.

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Links

[1] <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/hiv-and-aids/our-priorities-in-hiv/gender-equality/anti-bullying/anti-bullying-participants/>

[2] <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/hiv-and-aids/our-priorities-in-hiv/gender-equality/anti-bullying/>