



**“Leadership in the Fight Against Homophobia”  
A Special Event at United Nations Headquarters, New York  
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***Video message by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu***

Among the most powerful ideas in the world are encapsulated in the words “freedom”, “equality” and “love.” Homophobia, just like racism and other forms of prejudice, is their antithesis.

Around the world, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and transgender people are denigrated, harassed, attacked, imprisoned, tortured, even killed – because of who they are, or whom they love. We cannot claim that our societies are free and equal as long as some amongst us are treated as inferior, denied even their basic human rights.

We struggled with this question for many years in South Africa, overturning an evil system that valued white people over black. I am proud that, when we finally succeeded in dismantling apartheid, we put in place a Constitution that prohibits all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. We did this because we understood that the freedom of one depends upon the freedom of all. We call it the spirit of *ubuntu*: the idea that I cannot be free if you are not also free.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have God’s love and acceptance. But they need acceptance and love from their brothers and sisters too. Nelson Mandela said “No one is born hating another person”. If people can learn to hate they can learn to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than hate.

It will take time and all our efforts to change attitudes. We all have opportunities in our daily lives to speak out against homophobia. And we must. The tidal wave of change is made up of a million ripples.

To those in the public eye, in positions of influence and leadership, you have a special responsibility to speak out, to help people to think again, to teach people to let go of their hate, their discomfort, their fear, and accept one another for who they are.

Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon has shown great leadership. We need more political leaders, religious and community leaders to take up the challenge. We need all Governments to protect people from violence and discrimination, to decriminalize same-sex love, and help educate the public.

And we need our brightest stars in the fields of music, television, movies and sport to become champions of equality as well. Popular culture can play a vital role in changing public attitudes and in challenging long-held stereotypes and prejudices.

I see signs of great hope: a growing global force against homophobia and transphobia that is bringing together people, communities and countries as never before. Often, it is younger generation leading the way and bringing with them a new openness and optimism.

The tide is turning. But more must be done. You, at the United Nations, have taken up this cause at long last. You must not pause now. Abuses must be documented and those responsible must be held to account. The victims of injustice are looking to you for support, for help, for protection. Please, do not let them down.

God bless you.

ENDS