LGBTs Are Blamed and Attacked for COVID-19, Say Global Reports

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LGBT people across the world are being falsely accused of spreading COVID-19 and harassed, incarcerated and abused as a result, according to a United Nations AIDS group and a global organization for gay men. The discrimination makes it even harder for this population to stay safe, access health care and exercise their basic human rights.

"HIV has taught us that violence, bullying and discrimination only serve to further marginalize the people most in need," said Winnie Byanyima, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS in a UNAIDS press release documenting reports of abuse. "All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, are entitled to the right to health, safety and security, without exception. Respect and dignity are needed now more than ever before."

UNAIDS and MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights are calling on governments to protect the rights of LGBT people during the COVID-19 crisis.

"We are receiving reports that government and religious leaders in some countries are making false claims and releasing misinformation about COVID-19 that has incited violence and discrimination against LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex] people," George Ayala, executive director of MPact, said in the press release. "Organizations and homes are being raided, LGBTI people are being beaten, and there has been an increase in arrests and threatened deportation of LGBTI asylum seekers."

Ayala added that advocates are increasingly concerned about governments using internet and smartphone technology to track people's movements during lockdowns. "Gay men and gender-nonconforming people are often the first targets and among the most impacted by increased policing and surveillance efforts," he said.

Police, for example, can single out LGBT people for allegedly breaking curfews. In Belize, a gay man with HIV was assaulted by police and is believed to have died. In the Philippines, according to

the UNAIDS report, LGBT people were among a group of people punished for breaking curfew but were singled out by the police captain and forced to dance and kiss each other.

To counter this discrimination and abuse, UNAIDS and MPact have issued a list of actions that countries and governments should take. This includes ending raids on LGBT organizations, denouncing misinformation that blames and scapegoats LGBT people for the spread of COVID-19, and including LGBT people in media campaigns and public health planning around the COVID-19 pandemic.

For a recent POZ Q&A with MPact's Ayala, who is also involved in the upcoming HIV2020 online global conference, see "Positive Response."

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