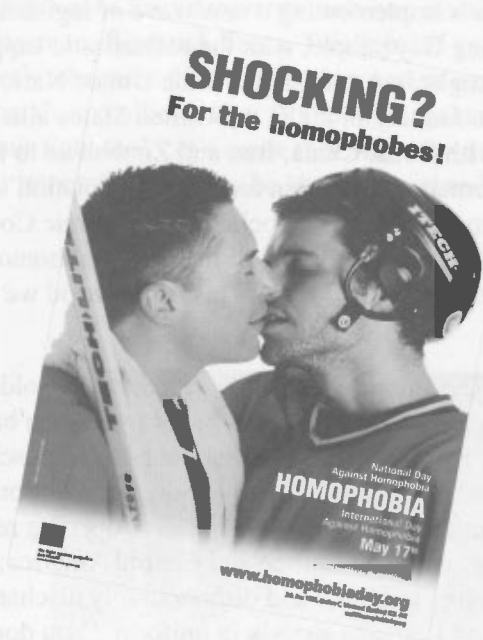


International Day Against Homophobia



Let's Kiss Off
the Homophobes!

Halifax,
May 17, 2007

On May 17, 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses, bringing to an end hundreds of years of institutionalized medical homophobia.

That was then, this is now. In Malaysia, you can be jailed for 20 years, and flogged as a grace note; in Uganda, the sentence is life in prison; in Iran, it is death. The crime is to be Gay. Nigeria is implementing a new wave of legislation targeting Gay people, with the enthusiastic support of its Anglican Archbishop. At the United Nations (UN) in January of 2006, the United States allied itself with Cuba, China, Iran and Zimbabwe to block the International Lesbian and Gay Association's attempt to join the UN's Social and Economic Council. This is but a sampling of international homophobia, hate on a global scale. This is the world we live in.

The United States is so desperate for soldiers to fight in Iraq that it has waived such basic requirements for enlistment as a high school diploma. It's taking people with drug convictions right out of prison and is considering opening recruiting centers in Europe and Central America; yet it continues to hound and dishonourably discharge Gays and Lesbians already in uniform. 'You don't gotta read or write, you can be a crook, heck we'll even make you a citizen, but you better not be Gay if you wanna die for the USA!' This is the world we live in.

Here in Canada we might feel comfortable that Stephen Harper's "New Canadian Government" failed to reintroduce same-sex marriage in Parliament. However, he still holds the public purse strings – one of his first acts as Prime Minister was to cut off federal funds for challenges to the law under the Charter of Rights

and Freedoms. We would still be fighting for our right to marry had that funding not been available in 2005. Just tough luck for Little Sisters and Glad Day Bookshop in their fight to end Canada Customs' censorship. Read Bill McKinnon's piece on *Égale* Canada in *Wayves* May issue and you'll see the chill Mr. Harper's action has put on our national LGBT rights group. Meanwhile, dozens of archaic statutes against sodomy and gross indecency remain on Canadian law books and the Catholic Archbishop of Halifax excommunicates a gentle, loving Gay couple in Yarmouth County. This is the country we live in.

Of course it's not all doom and gloom. Canada is still a beacon of hope. The Anglican Bishop of New Westminster BC, along with Bishop Desmond Tutu and others, is challenging homophobia within the World Anglican Communion. Madame Justice Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who delivered the keynote speech at last year's LGBT rights conference at the Outgames, recently heard a full presentation by a consortium of European LGBT rights groups. For the first time in history a group from Québec, called *Fondation Émergence*, established a theme day for the fight against homophobia. June 4, 2003 was designated "National Day Against Homophobia," and within two years the idea had been taken up around the country. Groups in Belgium, France and the UK came on board and, in recognition of the historic significance of the WHO decision, changed the date to May



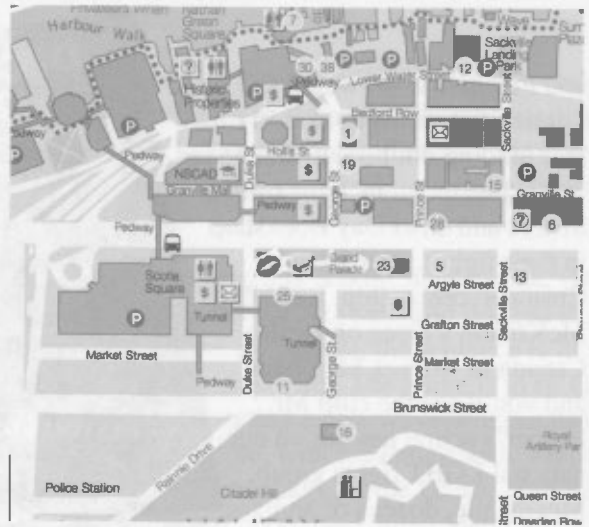
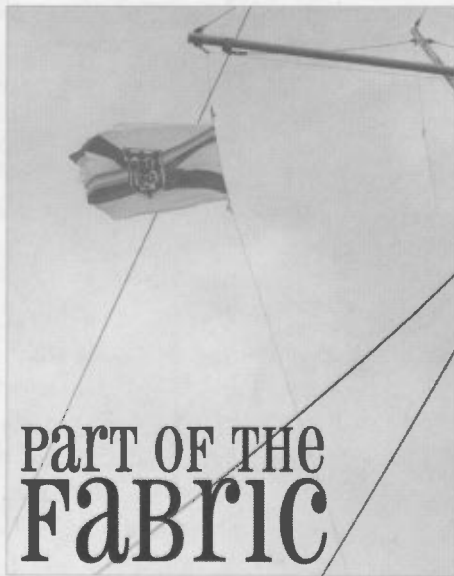
17. Last summer, the Declaration de Montréal was read aloud at the Outgames opening ceremony by Martina Navratilova, calling "on all countries and the United Nations, to recognise the 17th of May of each year as the International Day Against Homophobia." *Fondation Émergence* spearheaded this movement and continues to lead the way, offering posters and pamphlets in both official languages to schools and LGBT organizations.

In Atlantic Canada, the day has been marked in Saint John, NB with an annual Freedom March. Last year Halifax Pride joined with NSRAP, Safe Harbour MCC, and the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia to host a special screening of "Brokeback Mountain." A similar event might take place this year and NSRAP is lobbying different levels of government to have the day officially recognized. Other provincial and local groups will no doubt be announcing events closer to the day.

All these initiatives are wonderful, yet I find myself wanting more. I think back on the protest marches of my younger days - the kiss-ins and the die-ins - often provoked by outrage, but always containing a sense of celebration, an element of optimism. I find myself nostalgic for the old chants of "Hey-hey! Ho-ho! Homophobia's got to go!" and "2 - 4 - 6 - 8! Gay is just as good as straight!" I want to take to take the fight directly to the homophobes and engage the larger public. On May 17, I propose an LGBT gathering in Halifax's Grand Parade, maybe even some sexy kissing on the steps of city hall - a public declaration of our freedom to love. All of our straight friends and allies could join in - after all the battle against homopho-

bia is their fight too! I invite my fellow Nova Scotians, Queer and otherwise to contact me at may17ns@yahoo.ca. Sign up to take part or share any ideas you may have. Hopefully this will start the ball rolling. In the meantime a group of like minded souls will start to preprepare the way.

In all my remembrances of protests passed, I cherish the exhilaration that came from coming together as one community, in all our wonderful diversity, uniting to fight a common foe. Homophobia hurts us all: it's root is heterosexism and it encompasses hatred towards each one of us, Lesbian, Gay man, Bisexual, Trans, TwoSpirited and Queer. Let's take strength in each other, and in our straight friends and allies - after all the fight against hate is their fight too! Let's make this May 17 a day we can all remember, a day to be happy, proud and free.



To learn more about international efforts, visit www.homophobiaday.org and www.ilga.org. To sign an online petition, go to www.idahomophobia.org.

To take part in May 17 in Halifax, email: may17ns@yahoo.ca; for more information visit gay.hfxns.org, click Events, and check the entry for May 17th.

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