

International / regional workshops and conferences

Developing guidelines for documentation and a regional study on rights abuse by RSFU October 11 - 15, 2009 - Delhi, India

"Two members of the WSG attended a meeting in Delhi, at the invitation of the RSFU. The WSG made a presentation of its activities that are funded by the RSFU. These activities are largely in the areas of capacity building, skills development, staff welfare, strengthening the evidence base (in relation to work out of Colombo) and maintaining a safe space and drop in centre for LBT women. The consultation drew together large representation of LGBT persons representing organizations in the South Asian region. As such, it is envisaged that the WSG, has built a strong network as a result of participating at this consultation"

Strategy Workshop by IGLHRC May 27-30, 2009 – Quezon City, Philippines

Two members from the WSG attended a Strategy Workshop to end violence against Non – Heteronormative Women on the basis of their sexual orientation Gender Identity or Gender Expression at the invitation of IGLHRC from the 27 – 30 May 2009, in Quezon City, Philippines.

The Workshop was well attended with participants from Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, China, India, Philippines, Indonesia and Pakistan. Many of the groups voiced concerns that violence against LBT individuals in Asia is under-reported, underrecognized, and receives scant attention.

The discussions revolved around reducing family, community and state-sponsored violence. The WSG presented a paper on the data it had documented with regard to violence against LBT persons. The WSG shared the definition it works with, with regard to violence against LBTs and mapped out the common elements of these cases. In addition to identifying common perpetrators, the WSG elucidated the strategies it had adopted when intervening in these cases. The presentation was followed by a discussion and many of the groups had queries with regard to the Sri Lankan context. The WSG shared the experiences it had, and the challenges it faced in working in the area of violence and sexuality.

The workshop was extremely beneficial as the WSG was able to identify common challenges faced by groups in the Asian region. Additionally the WSG had the opportunity to have a skype conversation with the Global Fund for Women, who appraised the WSG of the criteria they adopt in granting funds. The WSG also strengthened its network within the Asian region. Additionally the WSG confirmed that it would be supported and be a part of the Asia research and documentation project, which would commence with an activists institute training on human rights documentation.

Post-Conference Training of the IASSCS April 16 - 28, 2009 - Hanoi, Vietnam

The International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) held its international conference this April in Hanoi, Vietnam on the theme "Contested Innocence – Sexual Agency in Public and Private Space". A WSG representative won a competitive scholarship from the Kartini Asia Network to attend the conference as well as the Post-Conference Training (PCT). The PCT, which was held for 10 days, was attended by nearly 30 scholars, all researchers/activists on sexual rights from various parts of the world, the majority being from the Asian region. Quantitative research methodologies, theoretical frameworks and major research output was discussed alongside the use of research for activism and the politics of 'insider/outsider' research in sexual rights themes. The WSG will benefit greatly from the networking and discussions that took place in the PCT.

Workshop on Human Rights in an LGBTIQ Perspective and Documentation of HR Violations by RSFU March 30 – April 03, 2009 – Mumbai, India.

This workshop was a skill building workshop designed to enrich LGBTIQ organisations in the South Asian region. The participant from the WSG attended all the sessions, the main content of which was: to give young activists a chance to understand the history and framework of Human Rights and then to look at it in an LGBTIQ perspective; as well as to teach activists the proper methods of documenting cases of HR violations against LGBTIQ persons. The analysis of each human right in the declaration in an LGBTIQ and minority perspective and the discussion that ensued was particularly thought-provoking. Each and every person attending the workshop had a story to tell about overcoming adversity. Some ended on a positive note of hope in their tales which I felt was very encouraging. The best thing about this workshop for me, was meeting the most interesting and diverse people I had ever met in my life and being accepted by the Hijra community as a like-minded person and friend.

Workshop on Gender and Sexuality by RFSU, November 27-30, 2008 - Katmandu, Nepal

Two key representatives of the Women's Support Group (WSG), attended this workshop on Gender & Sexuality from the 27th to the 30th October 2008, which was conducted for the South Asian LGBT rights groups by RFSU (the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education) and hosted by the Blue Diamond Society. The purpose of this event was to raise awareness on gender & sexuality, thereby building a strong & supportive network within South Asian activists & LGBT organizations. It was also an opportunity for the regional activists to network and catch up with all the events happening in the region.

AWID Forum 2008 'Power of Movements', November 14-17, 2008 - cape Town, South Africa

The AWID is a major feminist gathering which aims to develop networks and movements in the women's rights movement. It brings together men and women working on gender issues, women's rights and the feminist movement from all regions in the world. They gather to talk about diverse issues ranging from access to water to education to violence.

The WSG was invited to present at two panels: one on the situation of LGBT rights at present in Sri Lanka and the other on our experiences while working on sexual rights advocacy at grassroots level in the vernacular languages. Both these panels were interesting as they highlighted the situation in Sri Lanka. In addition to the panel presentations, this was a good opportunity to network with all the other regional and international women's organisations as well as the sexual rights advocates, to discuss our ideas on global trends and regional possibilities.

REACH 08 'Rise for Equality, Act for Change & Hope', October 19-21, 2008 - Sri Jayewardene Pura, Sri Lanka

This was a skill-building youth conference with the purpose of educating the youth in the Asian region about HIV and AIDS as well as training participants as peer educators. Two representatives of the WSG attended the conference while our Coordinator was invited to be part of a panel presentation on the link between women and HIV/AIDS.

It was an inspiring conference to attend and present as it gathered a large number of youth from diverse countries, as well as various backgrounds. It also had a large number of youth volunteers and others who were being educated as peer educators.

South Asian LGBTI Partnership Building Workshop, September 3 - 4, 2008 - Kathmandu, Nepal

The first South Asia LGBTI partnership building workshop was hosted by LLH Norway and Blue Diamond Society in Kathmandu, Nepal on. Participants from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were present for this workshop.

The WSG was represented at this workshop by its coordinator. A situational analysis in each country was presented initially with a focus on social, legal and cultural issues currently being faced. The workshop aimed to form partnerships amongst South Asian LGBTI groups and communities, share experiences, learn from each other and support the LGBTI movement in South Asia. It also aimed to advance our rights, ensure justice and strengthen our knowledge in the field of South Asian social and cultural sexuality.

One of the main objectives of this meeting was to float the idea of forming a Human Rights Commission that will be focusing solely on the sexual rights situation of the South Asian region. This idea was taken up positively though it will entail many more meetings and discussions before becoming a reality.

South – South-East Asia Training on Sexual Rights, Colombo

The International gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and Human Rights Watch conducted a workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which was hosted by INFORM (Human Rights Documentation Centre) and the Women's Support Group. The Workshop was attended by representatives of South and South-East Asian LGBT organisations, and included members of groups such as The Blue Diamond Society (Nepal), Aanchal and Humsafar Trust (Mumbai, India), Naz Foundation International and Sangini (Delhi, India), Sangama (Bangalore, India), Bandhu (Bangladesh), Komnas Ham (Indonesia), etc.

Two members from the WSG participated and learnt many things, including security measures to be taken by LGBT groups in countries with sensitive environments like ours, and working with the intricate UN Human Rights.

In addition all the workshop activities, meeting our brothers and sisters of organizations working on similar issues was a wonderful experience.

8th International Congress on Aids in Asia Pacific, Colombo

Women in same sex relationships don't have a high profile in HIV/AIDS usually. However, at this year's ICAAP – 19th to the 23rd August 2007 - the WSG participated actively. Two members of the WSG received scholarships to participate in the Congress. In addition, another three members received scholarships from a friend of the WSG.

Our work started at the Community Forum on the 19th August 2007, where the participants produced the Community Statement to be read at the Opening Ceremony the same evening. The WSG is very proud that they could include a section on sexual rights in the statement, advocating "for the decriminalisation of 'sexual offences' between consenting adults" as well as for "education on sexualities and sexual rights at all levels of society".

At a satellite meeting organised by Asia-Pacific Rainbow – "LGBT/MSM and HIV in Asia and the Pacific: Leadership and Challenges in Communities" – on 21st August, 2007 the WSG made a presentation. We were the only women's organisation at the panel, and the only organisation from South Asia, the other representatives being from Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. The WSG discussed the challenges faced when organising rural sexual health workshops for women, the umbrella term under which HIV/AIDS are discussed. We also underscored the lack of sexual health knowledge and lack of access to such knowledge that women are faced with in rural areas. It was a very fruitful discussion, with the audience raising many questions for the whole panel. The WSG thanks APR for giving us this opportunity.

On the same day, the WSG also spoke at the *Praja Shalawa* or Community Space at the Asia-Pacific Village. Here the WSG briefly spoke of our activities and shared some experiences with the activists present from various countries. We also held the Lesbian Caucus on the 21st of August. Even though there were not many LBT women present, we did meet part of the youth community who wanted to discuss and get to know the problems facing the LBT community in Sri Lanka.

Finally, but very importantly, the WSG collaborated with the Companions on a Journey to organise the Community Party, the official party of the ICAAP. This was held at the Onyx, Taj Samudra Hotel and was a raving success, with nearly 600 delegates attending it. Everyone had a fun-filled time at the Party as evident in the photos (please see Gallery).

Overall, it was a very good experience for the WSG and we thank everyone involved in making our participation and our events a success.

International Consultation of Women Human Rights Defenders, Colombo

The WSG was very happy to be involved with the work of this Conference. The conference was held from the 29th of November to the 2nd of December 2005. It was home to an international group of 200 women human rights defenders and also for men who defend women's human rights. Delegates shared experiences and developed a range of strategies to combat violence, discrimination and other abuses they experience specifically because of their gender and because of their work in defence of human rights.

The meeting focused on four separate sources of abuses commonly experienced by women human rights defenders. These included state-based violence and issues of accountability and justice; the growing rise in fundamentalist movements seeking and gaining political power; the use of sexuality-based attacks to intimidate women and harm their bodies and reputations; and the need to address abuse perpetrated by communities and families.

Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International and a speaker at the closing public event, said: "All of us – women and men – must demand the protection of those who defend women's rights and women who defend all human rights, insist on justice when they're attacked, and fight for them to be given the recognition they are due."

Three WSG members participated in the conference. One of the highlights of the conference was the inclusion of a Diverse Sexuality Caucus, at which sexual rights activists from different parts of the world came together to discuss issues surrounding their activism and brain storm strategies by which to achieve goals that seemed common to most of the activists. The participants were able to engage in various skills building workshops as well.

The WSG also organized a 'Women Only' party at one of the leading night clubs in Colombo. It was attended by most of the participants and was enjoyed by all. It also provided the participants with an informal environment in which to build networks and friendships with other individual activists and organizations.

[The 10th AWID International Forum on Women's Rights and Development, Bangkok](#)

The AWID forum, held on 27th to 30th October 2005, is a great event to meet other women's and sexual rights activists. The theme of the forum was "How does change happen?" As a forum that brings together people from all over the world - from places as far apart as the U.S.A., Serbia, India and New Zealand – representing many different concerns this was the exact place to discuss the makings of change. "Governing Digital Spaces", "Changing Public Opinion on HIV/AIDS", "Patterns for Change: Labor Rights in the Garment Industry", "Is There Any Movement? Social Change in the US" and "How Can We Balance Pleasure, Sexuality and Safety" are just a taste of the wide range of session topics.

For the WSG, the Forum was an extremely important experience. There were a number of sessions focusing on sexual rights. LGBT issues, sex workers' rights, transgender and transsexual issues were all discussed at the Forum. The WSG made its most important contribution as part of the panel titled "All Fired Up! Young Women Advocate for Sexual Rights." Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) of India brought together this panel of Sri Lankan (WSG), Indian and Filipina (NAPY) activists on sexual rights. The panel discussed the role of young women in leadership in a cultural and political climate that create so many problems for sexual rights activism in their countries. Many women who were in the audience later approached us to say that it was one of their more enjoyable and informative sessions. The WSG is very happy to have been part of this panel at the AWID Forum.

Our two representatives attended many sessions held by other activists and organizations during those four days. In the Final Plenary, there was a chance for many participants to propose fundamental changes for the way ahead. While we acknowledged the acceptance given to sexual rights to a major extent at the AWID Forum, activists called for a more central place in social movements for LGBT rights and sex workers' rights. The AWID Forum was a space for getting to know many people. It was also a space for defining the future avenues of advocacy for many activists at the Forum.

[ILGA Asia Conference, Cebu](#)

The WSG was represented by the coordinator at the ILGA Asia Regional Conference which was held in Cebu, Philippines from 20th to the 23rd October 2005. The WSG presented a paper on the situation of same sex rights in Sri Lanka and reported on our work in the country. We also met many other regional LGBT activists at this conference. As usual this was a good platform to discuss issues specific to the region. In addition to the presentation the WSG also participated in various other panel discussions and social activities. Overall, it was a very enriching experience indeed!

[49th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, New York](#)

This conference, better known as the **Beijing+10** was held to review the status of the Beijing Action Plan on women's rights. Two representatives from the WSG attended the Beijing+10 in New York, USA, from 03rd – 13th March 2005, with the support of the Hivos Foundation.

The WSG representatives attended many different events during these few days. The seminar held by Amnesty International on '**Making Women's Rights a Reality: How to hold your Government to Account to Achieve Real Change**' where Susanna Fried, Programme Director, IGLHRC, spoke on how the standard of due diligence enabled activists to call on the governments to intervene in instances of violence against women in the family. She made particular mention of a case involving two lesbians in Nepal, in which the incidence of violence against the two women by their families which had led to long-term mental scarring.

They also attended a symposium titled '**Holding on to the Promise: Future Directions for Women's Human Rights**'. Eight speakers from Sri Lanka, Fiji, Brazil, USA, and South Africa made presentations at this forum on their vision of advancing women's human rights after Beijing Plus Ten. The Sri Lankan speaker, Ms Sunila Abeysekera, strongly urged the women's movement to revive the spirit of radicalism.

The highlight of their visit was related to their work with the Diverse Sexualities Caucus of the CSW. Through the last week of the conference, the Caucus comprised delegates working on sexual rights from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Hungary, Malaysia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and the US. Meeting almost every morning in the last week of the conference, they planned their action around the main goals of highlighting the place of sexual rights in the spectrum of international human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Caucus drafted an oral intervention, but were disappointed to be later notified that due to the tight time schedule of the sessions, they could not be given the space. Although disappointed, they managed to circulate the document widely at the conference.

The WSG members attended many other events on LGBT and women's human rights issues. Notable among this was the women's march through New York City and demonstration at Dag Hammerskjold Plaza opposite the UN on 8 March, Women's Day. The march and demonstration, which was organized by Code Pink, an organization that worked with women in peace-building activities, was memorable.

South-South Movement Building & Strategic Dialogue on Reproductive Rights and Sexual Rights, New Delhi

From February 14th – 16th 2005, five South Asian organisations organised this conference as part of the Inter South Dialogues in New Delhi, India. Two WSG members attended the Dialogues, which focused on sharing strategies on sexual rights work between the South Asian countries and the Latin American countries. This Dialogue was attended by a number of women's rights and human rights activists in India with representatives from Bangladesh and Nepal as well. From Latin America, there were four leading activists from Peru and Chile. The most important topic under discussion on this day was the **Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights**. The Convention started as an idea in 1998. Thereafter, CLADEM (an alliance between various rights-based groups) invited various other organisations to join the campaign for the Convention. At present 14 countries in the South American region are in the campaign. The Campaign aims to make sure that sexual rights and democratic rights are not additional issues but rights that are an integral part of a democratic agenda. Therefore, it has built alliances with various movements such as the feminist movement, women's movement, youth movement, GLBTT movement, Afro-descendant women's movement, indigenous women's movement, human rights movement and the HIV/AIDS movement.

There were presentations from the countries – India, Nepal and Sri Lanka – on the progress of abortion rights and sexual rights movements. It was obvious by these presentations that Nepal had the most progressive state of affairs at present, with abortion being permitted by legal provisions, thereby making safe and healthy abortions available to women of all backgrounds.

There were also three presentations on the sexual rights movement in the three countries. A WSG member presented the situation in Sri Lanka, with the Indian presenter commenting that they had the same problems of invisibility, discrimination within the women's and human rights movements, and the legal provisions supplied by British colonialism. Nepal's Blue Diamond presented the many experiences they had gained in their few years of organising, commenting that they faced much state-sanctioned harassment. Throughout these three days, the presentations as well as the ensuing discussions and dialogues were important and thought-provoking.

The WSG members also took this opportunity to meet with other LGBT activists in India. We met with and attended a meeting of PRISM, a group that works on advocacy and lobbying for sexual rights, where we exchanged information and ideas on the issues that are relevant to both Indian and Sri Lankan activism. The group also included two members of *Anjuman*, an LGBT support group based within the Jawaharlal Nehru University. The WSG also met with members of *Sangini*, a support group for LBT women based in New Delhi, and spent a day with them discussing their work, and the similarities of their issues with the WSG.

22nd ILGA World Conference, Manila

The WSG attended the 22nd ILGA World Conference – “Surviving Discrimination, Celebrating Ourselves” – from 11-18 November in 2003. The participation of two WSG members at this event was made possible with the support of the Global Fund for Women.

Two representatives attended this conference, one being the ILGA Asia representative at the time. Our members attended some of the pre-conference sessions as well. These sessions which were conducted by a Manila-based psychologist was a useful introduction on the concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, aimed at the youth population. On the first day of the Women's Caucus itself, the WSG made a presentation on the state of transgender people in Sri Lanka.

The World Conference consisted of many plenaries and small group discussions. The general topics under discussion were Men and Discrimination; Transgender person's issues; LGBT Youth and Discrimination; the Brazilian Resolution etc.

The conference was important as an opportunity for presenting the work of the WSG and as a space for networking with LGBTI organisations from around the world.

The conference also involved key elections to key posts in ILGA's governing structure. We were proud that Rosanna Flamer-Caldera – a co-coordinator of the WSG at the time – was unanimously elected to be the ILGA Co-Secretary-General.

ILGA Asia Regional Conference, Mumbai

The first International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) Asia Regional Conference took place in Mumbai, India on 11th-13th October 2002. ILGA's member organizations in Mumbai – HUMSAFAR TRUST and AANCHAL – were the hosts for this breakthrough event for Asia. “A to Z; the other Asia” brought together activists and organizations from the entire Asian Region to celebrate the diversity that is Asia.

Included in the conference were workshops and plenaries on a range of subjects which included Heritage and Cultures of Sexualities in Asia, Religious Oppression on Sexuality and Gender, Women's Sexual Health in Patriarchal Cultures, Laws and Policies on Sexuality, Migration caused by Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, AIDS, and Male Sexual Health and its impact on women. Over 80 delegates from around Asia participated, including several members from the WSG as well. Papers were presented by the WSG on: (a) *Lesbian Suicides in Sri Lanka*, (b) *Lesbians under 18: what are the solutions?* (c) *Challenges faced by transgender persons in Sri Lanka*

The WSG members who participated in the Conference gained valuable insight into other activists and their work and were able to network effectively with them creating a support base, which went a long way in effecting change on LGBT issues here in Sri Lanka.