

## REPORT Participation in ICE 48th Session, Geneva, 25-28/11/2008

### Introduction

The Global Alliance for LGBT Education took part in the International Conference on Education (ICE), organised by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE). The ICE, held from 25 to 28 November in Geneva, is a conference for government representatives to discuss how access to education and educational strategies can be strengthened. It is held every four years. The conference can be attended by non-governmental visitors, but these visitors have no speaking rights in sessions.

The theme of this conference was '*Inclusive Education*'. In the UNESCO tradition, 'inclusive education' originally referred to special needs education, that is to provide disabled students more access to schools. In the past decade, the concept has been expanded first from just access to include educational strategies and school policies and, more recently, to a wider interpretation of the concept of 'inclusion'. In the recent documents, 'inclusive education' refers to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. There is also a trend to see inclusion more as a guiding principle to a process, rather than a specific outcome.

GALE contacted the Dutch government for support of their participation. The Dutch Ministry of Education graciously invited the GALE representatives to participate as part of the official Dutch government's delegation. This allowed the GALE representatives to be able to speak during sessions. Also, the Dutch permanent representation in Geneva agreed to collaborate with GALE to host a small reception for conference attendants at their offices.

GALE had tried to attend the conference with a gender-balanced delegation. Unfortunately, the invited female International Advisory Committee members had to excuse themselves at the last moment. The representatives were Peter Dankmeijer (executive director) and Wim Monasso (secretary of the working group in international collaboration).

### Objectives

GALE set two objectives for the participation in the ICE.

1. to familiarise with the process and procedures of this inter-governmental (world) conference, so as to identify niches, ways and means to introduce GALE and its LGBT-educational agenda in the ICE framework;
2. to establish new network contacts for developing GALE's global constituency

### Division of roles / tasks

Peter Dankmeijer and Wim Monasso attended the plenary sessions and selected workshops, as well as one out of the eight scheduled side events.

Given his capacity as a professional pedagogue/educator/trainer, Peter Dankmeijer planned to insert possible content suggestions into the conference communication flow.

Wim Monasso concentrated on network development with participating delegates of countries that were potentially interesting for GALE's expansion of membership.

Wim Monasso also focused on distributing the formal invitation cards for the Wednesday evening reception at the Dutch Mission; due to the circumstances, we could hand these invitations out only one day before the event, which was rather late for reaching the desired (particularly African and Asian) invitees.

### Actions and results

The GALE representatives got acquainted with and integrated into the Dutch Government's Delegation; this connectedness will be useful for future similar action (e.g. at the next, 49<sup>th</sup> ICE).

Peter Dankmeijer successfully intervened in two workshops (see annexes for detailed content). The interventions raised some eyebrows, especially of government representatives who were not used to such issues being raised in this forum. However, the tone of the interventions, which referred to inclusion of LGBT students in schools and curricula as one of a range of aspects of quality education, were welcomed by many participants.

One of the interventions, which shared the Dutch experience of research and implementation of a "LGBT Safer Schools" project, was picked up by one of the keynote speakers, from New Zealand.

The reception at the office of the Dutch permanent representation in Geneva had about 20 people attending. This was half of the number we hoped for. Wim Monasso secured 13 oral confirmations to attend the GALE reception, but most of these persons have not shown up, for unknown reasons. Mr. Robert-Jan Sieben of the Dutch Permanent Representation and Mr. Peter Dankmeijer (GALE) held short inspiring speeches.

The many conversations GALE had with government representatives and observers created a basis for an informal network of interested allies.

GALE gained new insights into the mechanisms of the ICE framework, and how best to invest our energies at a next similar occasion.

#### LGBT rights addressed in the plenary

One of the attendants of the reception got so inspired, that he resolved to intervene during a plenary session. He did so the next day.

However, this speaker was a teacher and consultant. Although he was formally a government representative, he was not experienced in diplomacy and in the UNESCO *mores*. He asked the chair of the plenary to acknowledge that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students had the same rights of inclusion as other students. This direct question embarrassed the chairing panel, which did not know how to handle it. They could not say "no", because that would undermine the principle of inclusion, and they could not say "yes" because the UN and certainly UNESCO is politically not ready for such a public statement.

In addition, the impression was created that the speaker was representing a large international donor agency. This compelled the official representative of this agency to intervene later in the meeting to apologize for the intervention of the first speaker. He said he hoped "the respectable position of XX in this forum would be restored and not considered a disreputable organization". He meant to apologize for the undiplomatic intervention, not to put down LGBT concerns, he said afterwards in private, but this nuance got lost to most attendants of the plenary.

A detailed description of what happened can be found in the annex. The names of the speaker and the donor organization have been omitted in this communication so as to prevent damaging future alliances and personal repercussions.

#### Conclusions of the conference

In the conclusions and recommendations the ICE adopted, article I.1 acknowledges that inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at quality education (...) eliminating all forms of discrimination. This statement is another step to broaden the concept of inclusive education.

#### Follow-up action by GALE

1. This report will be sent to representatives who gave GALE their business cards and the representatives who agreed to come to the reception but did not attend.
2. These contacts will be asked to join an informal GALE mailing list to discuss further collaboration in the UNESCO context.
3. GALE will submit a formal request for starting operational relations with UNESCO in December 2008. In this GALE-submission, the strategy to focus on the general quality of education and the necessity to go for inclusive education without exceptions, will be furthered.
4. GALE will discuss with the Dutch delegation and with other government representatives how LGBT issues can be further included in UNESCO and in governments agenda's.

5. GALE will explore the possibilities to include explicit mention of LGBT concerns in the new declaration on human rights education and training (which will be drafted in 2009).
6. GALE will explore the possibilities to include mention of LGBT needs for inclusion in education in the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) of the human rights situation in countries concerned.