

Out In The Open

Report of Civil Society Meeting

18 May 2016, 15:30-17:00

The Civil Society Meeting was a side event after the formal closure of the UNESCO conference “Out in the open”. It was organized by GALE (formal partner of UNESCO) with a mandate of a small committee consisting of ILGA World, ILGA-Europe, IGLYO and GATE. The meeting was graciously chaired by Boris Dittrich (Human Rights Watch). There were 49 people present, of whom 45 were civil society attendants to the conference (of the total 70 civil society attendants). In addition there were some volunteers from MAG. Rebeca Sevilla (Education International; the federation of educational trade unions) claimed and was granted observer status.

1. Reflection on the conference

The meeting started with some short impressions by participants.

Helen Kennedy (ILGA, EGALE Canada) stated happiness that there are now clear efforts to put LGBT issues on the education agenda, but also expressed her disappointment in the lack of real partnership between government officials and civil society. This disappointment was shared by others who noted that:

- the participants lists were not shared which limited potential for interaction
- apart from breaks the conference did not provide spaces for civil society and government officials to meet, to share experiences and to discuss ways forward
- the drafting of the Ministerial Call for Action was a strictly closed door process

Some civil society representatives also felt that the quality of the current text of the Call would have benefitted from some form of civil society consultation.

The lack of civil society consultation and partnership was also noted in a wider sense. In the past years, UNESCO has initiated a laudable number of government contacts, but often has acted on its own in this. Some civil society representatives noted instances where both their own organization and UNESCO have governments contacts with their State officials but that such contacts were not exchanged or coordinated, which limited the impact of the current

strategy and also may have led to the rather low number of States that signed the Call until now. Some civil society organizations believe they could have had a positive impact on the commitment of their government, and that their efforts would have been enhanced by opportunities to be involved in pre-drafting of the Call.

On the other hand, many civil society representatives were very happy that UNESCO did take a great number of initiatives and made resources available to do research. Robby Pérez Baeza (Arco Iris, Mexico), Tran Khac Tung (Giam Doc, Vietnam), Julio Dantas (Fundacion Todo Mejora, Chile) and Moniek Soesman (Rutgers WPF, Indonesia) noted that the UNESCO and GLSEN researches were the first or among the first initiatives to put sexual diversity on the education agenda, and that the operational cooperation between their organizations and UNESCO (and GLSEN) was smooth and satisfying.

Notwithstanding this, Kaj Poelman (Cavaria, Belgium) asked why there is such an exclusive focus on fact finding and not much on exploring and sharing good practices.

Peter Dankmeijer (GALE) explained that this focus is due to the strategic choice UNESCO made at the start of the current project (2011-2016). UNESCO acts on the belief that finding and presenting facts (especially on prevalence of bullying and discrimination) is the main way to put attention for LGBTI issues on State agendas. NGO's may have a more differentiated view on this. However, although the UNESCO strategy was informed by a global meeting with experts in 2011, the strategic planning on how to proceed was done by UNESCO alone.

Elin Lilijenbladh (IGLYO) voiced frustration from the perspective of youth that not enough action is being taken. She suggested to stop talking and *do* something *now*. She is looking for real impact on LGBTI youth lives.

Steve Mmapaseka Letsike (National AIDS Council 'SANAC', South Africa) concludes there are some missed opportunities. Letsike asks how we can integrate the current initiatives in a more coherent follow-up. One question in this is how civil society can coordinate its voices and make them heard. How do we do that?

Srun Sorn (independent, Cambodia) notes that as civil society organizations, we lack information on the situation and options we may have. We need more information about how UNESCO relates to governments in general and to specific governments. It also needs to be more clear how UNESCO relates to civil society and can involve them as partners. Sorn also pleads for facilitation of GO/NGO networking in next meetings and conferences. Finally,

Srorn wonders what the actual commitment is from governments for action after this conference. The Ministerial Call is comprehensive but at the same time very vague about this.

2. Involvement of NGO's in the post-conference strategy

A second part of the meeting was dedicated to discussing whether as civil society organizations should we support UNESCO to start a follow-up strategy, and if so, what the position of civil society organizations should be.

There were several suggestions for concrete follow-up initiatives. For example, it was suggested LGBTI civil society organizations could take part in the upcoming global conference on cyberbullying in Seoul. Nicholas Carlisle (USA, No Bullying) is attempting to stimulate and coordinate LGBTI visibility in this conference. On the other hand, some others thought that putting too much energy in such a generic anti-bullying event would be costly but may not have the desired global mainstreaming impact, or that we should look into how such participation fits into a wider strategy.

Some others stated that they rely on UNESCO to be able to do anything at all in the area of LGBTI rights, so they were strongly in favor of a follow-up strategy. They need the potential budget but also hope for some impact on government policies.

Peter Dankmeijer (GALE) told about GALE's experience with organizing national strategic workshops, where government officials, education sector experts and LGBTI NGO's are brought together and facilitated to enter in a strategic dialogue on next steps and concrete cooperation. He believes that such type of initiatives can catalyze both networking and strategic cooperation.

Julio Dantas (Chile) thinks UNESCO should aim to get at least 30 more signatures to the Ministerial Call. Julio doubts whether UNESCO has the budget to implement a follow-up; he heard that UNESCO faces budget cuts. Peter Dankmeijer explains that the current Anti-SOGIE-Bullying project was not paid by regular UNESCO budget but from specific grants from the Dutch and Norwegian governments. For a follow-up, UNESCO needs more of these specific grants. Civil society organizations can be instrumental in this by advocating for this with their governments. Peter added that other UN organizations like UNDP, UNFPA,

UNAIDS and UNICEF may have larger budgets and that (stimulating a) streamlining or combining of such budgets and activities may also have an efficiency effect. Civil society organizations can take up a position in this.

It is noted that for some initiatives budget is not a crucial factor, or that national funding may be available. But these are small scale initiatives.

The participants conclude that it would be good to take position in such matters, but that at this time most representatives are lacking adequate information about the context and possibilities to make decisions on this.

3. Next steps

To conclude, the participants discussed the next steps they want to take. The following steps were decided:

1. GALE has created a listserv to facilitate communication among the participants. GALE has suggested to open this list to other NGO's after the conference, but to reserve it for NGO's. The participants agree to use this list in this way.
2. GALE has made a draft NGO resolution. It is decided not to adopt this, because it is too early to make decisions like that.
3. On the suggestion of Helen Kennedy, the participants decide there is a need to make an assessment of the impact of the UNESCO strategy until now from the civil society perspective. Based on this, civil society organizations can make a decision if we want to support UNESCO in next steps on the global level, and if yes, to take initiatives on forging the type of cooperation we wish with UNESCO. Aspects that should be taken into account are:
 - a. Tiffany Jones proposed never closing doors on useful UN allies, but defining:
(1) *what clear goals different groups of civil society assert now* for global engagement (which will vary depending on the different states' constraints), and (2) *how different UN bodies could enable these goals* (remembering UNESCO offers the highest level authority in global education policy work, UNDP may offer money/resourcing, UNICEF and other bodies may offer different tools).
 - b. The impact assessment should take the situation in countries where same-sex contacts are illegal into account
 - c. The follow-up proposal needs to take into account how to foster dialogue across GO's en NGO's

- d. The follow-up proposal should think about the positions of the international LGBTI organizations like GALE*, ILGA, IGLYO* and GATE (*GALE and IGLYO have consultative status with UNESCO.)
4. It is decided to start a proposal committee which will make the impact assessment and a follow-up proposal.
- a. The committee will involve researchers to help guide the impact assessment
 - b. The committee will contact other UN agencies and bodies to get adequate information about potentials for follow-up
 - c. GALE has some budget to function as secretariat for the committee and will take the initiative
 - d. The volunteers for the committee are:
 1. Julio Dantas (Chile)
 2. Lina Cuellar Wills (Colombia)
 3. Miguel Fuentes (Mexico)
 4. Robby Pérez Baeza (Mexico)
 5. Srun Sorn (Cambodia)
 6. Sally Richardson/Tiffany Jones (Australia)
 7. Helen Kennedy (ILGA)
 8. Joe Kosciw (USA)
 9. Joseph Akoro (Nigeria)
 10. Mmapaseka Steve Letsike (South Africa)
 11. Yang Shi (China)
 12. Nicholas Carlisle (UK)
 13. Toni Reis (Brazil)
 14. Jarold Edwin Nowaseb (Namibia)
 15. Rafail Bildas (Greece)
 16. Slava (Vyacheslav) Melnyk (Poland)
 17. Eve Silva (Chile)
 18. Tamara Adrian (GATE)
 19. Elin Lilijenbladh (IGLYO)
 20. Maria von Känel (European Lesbian* Conference)
 21. Peter Dankmeijer (GALE)

Sophie Aujean (ILGA-Europe) and Boris Dittrich (Human Rights Watch) will be observers on the committee. It may be that representatives from the European “Be The Change” youth initiative will be added to the committee in

due time.