



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of International Day against Homophobia and
Transphobia**

16 May 2012

Every day, in schools all over the world, young people are being bullied and attacked verbally and physically because of their presumed sexual orientation.

Homophobic bullying is an unacceptable infringement of basic human rights. In the school environment, homophobia is a direct violation of the right to quality education. It can lead to absenteeism and is a factor of academic failure and sometimes suicide. It is a cause of suffering that follows individuals outside the classroom, on the Internet and into adulthood.

The right to quality education is not just the preserve of the few. It is a universal right. All pupils – all of them – are entitled to quality education, in a safe environment which States are responsible for guaranteeing.

Protecting the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people is not a matter for one category or another. It concerns us all. Their struggle for dignity contributes to the universality of human rights. We stand alongside them.

Schools are places for learning and developing. What happens in them reflects and determines the life of society as a whole. No one can allow a climate of hatred and contempt to take root there. Schools must not destroy the children whom they are duty-bound to support.

For 65 years now, UNESCO has worked to combat violence against schools and violence inside schools. On the eve of International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, I am counting on the mobilization of all – teachers, parents, politicians and civil society – and I call on you to choose respect and not discrimination.

It is our duty to speak out and to take action, even though this is said to be a difficult subject. We must do so precisely because it is a difficult subject.

Momentum is growing across the world against discrimination towards lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people.

Attention to homophobic bullying is rising from many sides. The evidence is deepening on its terrible consequences.

As the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said recently, “a historic shift is under way.”

Last December, UNESCO organized in Brazil the first-ever United Nations-sponsored technical consultation on homophobic bullying in educational institutions.

These consultations brought together experts from 25 countries, to explore examples of good policies and practices.

The discussions showed what can be done, *whatever the context*, to ensure the right to education for all.

Today, we are launching a publication that showcases many of these policies and practices.

This is a really important step forward.

We must continue moving ahead.

All of us have a role to play here.

For its part, UNESCO and its partners will continue to explore how we can support countries in fighting against all forms of discrimination.

Human rights are not just for some – to be universal, to be meaningful, they must be for all.

When human rights are at stake, we must stand united, or we do not stand at all.

Irina Bokova