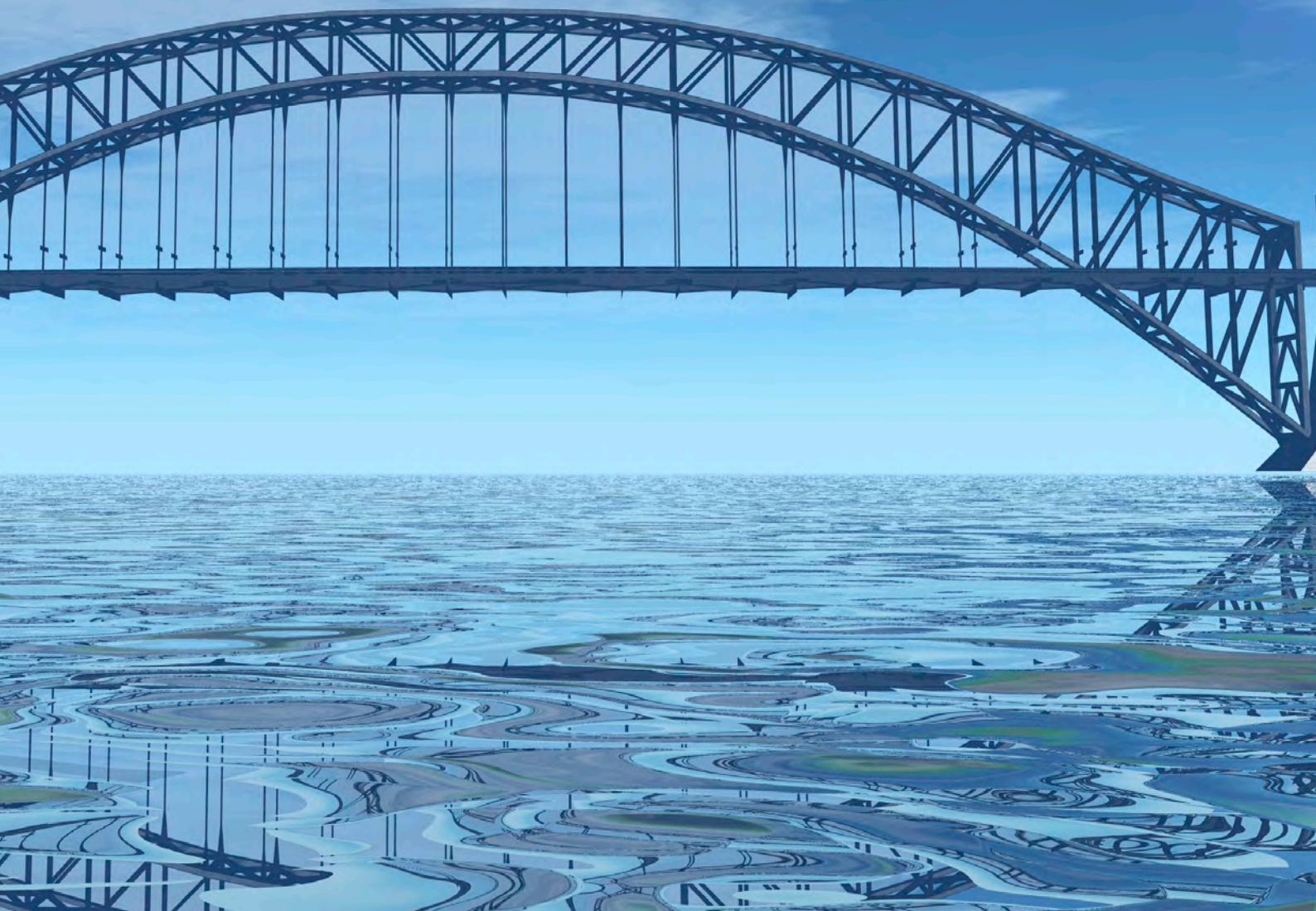




Parliamentarians for Global Action  
Parlamentarios para la Acción Global  
Action Mondiale des Parlementaires  
برلمانيون من أجل التحرك العالمي

# MYTHS vs. REALITIES

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MYTHS  
AND REALITIES ABOUT LGBTI PEOPLE





**MYTH: HOMOSEXUALITY IS A “WESTERN PHENOMENON”.**

Not infrequently, comments are made in public that undermine the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people. As leaders who believe in respecting human rights, we should use every opportunity in our work and day-to-day lives to speak up for the dignity and human rights of all individuals, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Here are some of the most common myths about LGBTI people and some suggestions on how to respond from a human rights standpoint.

## REALITY:

Claims that same-sex attraction is a Western practice are false. **LGBTI people exist everywhere, in all countries, among all ethnic groups, at all socioeconomic levels and in all communities** and have for a very long time.

What is true is that many of the criminal laws that continue to be used today to punish LGBTI people in many countries are Western in origin and are a legacy of 19th Century colonial powers. This remains the case even though most former colonial powers no longer have these same discriminatory laws in place. Many have replaced them with legislation that promotes equality.



**MYTH: DEPRIVING LGBTI PEOPLE OF THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS CAN BE JUSTIFIED ON GROUNDS OF RELIGION, CULTURE OR TRADITION.**

**REALITY:**

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity can never be justified on any basis. Human rights are universal: every human being is entitled to the same rights, no matter who they are or where they live. History, culture and religion are all very important, but **all States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, have a legal duty to promote and protect the human rights of all.** This includes the rights of all LGBTI people.

Religious freedom means the right to our beliefs, but it does not give us the right to impose our views on others, including by discriminating against or otherwise harming them.



**MYTH: LGBTI PEOPLE ARE “NOT NORMAL,” THEY ARE A CREATION OF THE MODERN AGE; THEIR IDENTITY IS A “TREND.”**

**REALITY:**

**Sexual orientation and gender identity are not “current trends.”** Almost every country has a recorded history of people whose identities and behaviours bear close resemblance to what we call today heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality and transgender identity.



**MYTH: LGBTI PEOPLE ARE REQUESTING “SPECIAL RIGHTS.”**

**REALITY:**

**This is not true. There are no special rights being claimed by or for LGBTI people. They are entitled to enjoy the same human rights and fundamental freedoms to which every human being is entitled.**

Regretfully, these rights and freedoms are denied to millions of people around the world just because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This is why there is a need to focus on ending discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and ensure the inclusion of all LGBTI people in development.



**MYTH: CRIMINALIZING HOMOSEXUALITY IS A GOOD IDEA.**

**REALITY:**

**Criminalizing private sexual relationships between consenting adults, whether the relationships are homosexual or heterosexual, is a violation of the right to privacy, is discriminatory in nature and violates international human rights law.**

When enforced, these laws violate rights to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention. Criminalization serves to legitimize hostile attitudes towards LGBTI people, feeding violence, discrimination, extortion and blackmail. Enforcing these laws costs a lot of money and brings no social value.



**MYTH: BY REPEALING LAWS THAT CRIMINALIZE SAME SEX ACTIVITY WE ARE “PROMOTING HOMOSEXUALITY.”**

**REALITY:**

Promoting equal rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people is not “promoting homosexuality” – it is promoting the same fundamental human rights for everyone. These are core values that all United Nations Member States have the obligation to uphold.



**MYTH: PARLIAMENTARIANS SHOULD FOLLOW PUBLIC OPINION WHEN THERE IS OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PUNITIVE LAWS AGAINST LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE.**

**REALITY:**

Parliamentarians have the responsibility to advance the human rights and inclusion of all people, no matter how unpopular this viewpoint might be.

Negative public attitudes can never justify human rights violations, including punitive laws and police harassment and brutality against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, any more than they can justify sexist, racist, xenophobic, sectarian and other discriminatory acts or policies. When there are discriminatory attitudes against certain groups, it is the responsibility of parliamentarians and others to work to overcome such discriminatory attitudes through public education, awareness raising and other measures.



**MYTH: THERE IS NOTHING IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS ABOUT LGBTI PEOPLE, SO THEY DO NOT APPLY.**

## REALITY:

Quite the contrary, **international human rights law applies to every person**. International human rights law establishes legal obligations on States to make sure that everyone, without distinction, can enjoy their human rights. A person's sexual orientation and gender identity is a status, like race, sex, colour and religion.

Many human rights treaty bodies, human rights mechanisms, special procedures, recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Council and United Nations resolutions and reports have repeatedly confirmed that **LGBTI people are entitled to all the same human rights as straight and cisgender people<sup>1</sup>** and that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity violates human rights law.

<sup>1</sup> Cisgender: A term referring to persons whose gender identity and gender expression match the sex they were assigned at birth and the social expectations related to their gender. (Source: ILGA).



**MYTH: WHEN OUR NATIONAL LEGISLATION DOES NOT CONFORM WITH HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS AND STANDARDS, THERE IS NOT MUCH WE CAN DO ABOUT IT.**

## REALITY:

Sometimes provisions of national laws and policies may conflict with fundamental rights enshrined in international law – whether it is in relation to the human rights of LGBTI persons or in relation to other groups or specific human rights standards.

**All States have a duty to review and reform national legislation and policies in line with international human rights standards**, including in relation to human rights treaty obligations. Parliament has the responsibility for lawmaking and therefore must also ensure that national legislation conforms with international human rights obligations.



**MYTH: THERE ARE MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS TO FOCUS ON RATHER THAN LGBTI RIGHTS – LIKE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SECURITY.**

## **REALITY:**

This is a common tactic to deflect attention away from and minimize or ignore State responsibilities to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of LGBTI people.

The human rights of LGBTI people, like all people, require serious and dedicated attention. LGBTI people are often the ones more likely to be denied equal access to education, health and security. **Protecting, respecting and fulfilling the rights of LGBTI people in no way prevents, obstructs or delays the resolution of any other matters.**



**MYTH: HOMOSEXUALITY IS AN ILLNESS, OR A HEALTH ISSUE.**

## **REALITY:**

More than 20 years ago the World Health Organization explicitly clarified that **homosexuality is neither a disorder nor a disease** and has emphasized that homosexuality is a natural and non-pathological variation of human sexuality.



**MYTH: WE CAN CHANGE A PERSON'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY.**

**REALITY:**

The World Health Organization has made clear that **sexual orientation cannot be changed**. Attempts to forcibly change the sexual orientation of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons are ineffective, harmful and may amount to torture.



**MYTH: ALL LGBTI PEOPLE HAVE HIV/AIDS.**

**REALITY:**

This is patently not true. **HIV/AIDS affects heterosexual, cisgender and LGBTI people, men and women**, in varying degrees according to the characteristics of the epidemic. In some regions of the world it is primarily a problem among the heterosexual population.

What is true, however, is that stigma, discrimination and exclusion of LGBTI people lead to lack of access to information on HIV and safe sex practices, prevention, testing, treatment, care and support. This leaves LGBTI people (and in particular transgender women) at higher risk of contracting HIV. Reducing stigma, eliminating discrimination and exclusion and, consequently, increasing access to services, is the right way to address the HIV epidemic for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.





**MYTH: BEING AROUND LGBTI PEOPLE OR HAVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON HOMOSEXUALITY ENDANGERS THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN.**

**REALITY:**

This is a myth. Learning about or spending time with people who are LGBTI does not influence the sexual orientation or gender identity of minors, nor does it harm their wellbeing.



**MYTH: GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE ARE “DANGEROUS TO CHILDREN.”**

**REALITY:**

No. There is no link whatsoever between being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and child abuse. Evidence shows that LGBTI people all over the world, just like straight and cisgender people, are good parents, teachers and role models for young people.

Portraying lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people as paedophiles or as dangerous to children is wrong and offensive. It is a distraction from the need for serious and appropriate measures to protect all children, including those coming to terms with their sexual orientation and gender identity. All forms of sexual abuse, including against children, should be prevented and punished wherever they occur and whoever is involved.



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This content has been extracted from *Advancing the Human Rights and Inclusion of LGBTI People: A Handbook for Parliamentarians*, a joint publication by Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that is available for download at: [www.pgaction.org/inclusion](http://www.pgaction.org/inclusion)