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Appendix D:

STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL GAY  
AND LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMMISSION, THE INTERNATIONAL LES-  
BIAN INFORMATION SERVICE, AND THE  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

Presented to the United Nations Economic Commission for  
Europe and to all Governments of Europe and North  
America present at the ECE High Level Regional  
Vienna, Austria  
17-21 October 1994

At the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Member States of the United Nations should take steps to reverse their historical failure to include lesbians in action for the advancement of women. The Vienna Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights affirmed that women's rights are inalienable human rights. The Fourth World Conference on Women should affirm that lesbian rights are fundamental components of the human rights of women. We urge the Governments of the ECE Region to take the opportunity presented by this preparatory meeting to examine the following issues:

REVIEWING THE FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES

In reviewing progress made since the Third World Conference on Women, this preparatory meeting should recognize the failure of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies to address the human rights abuses that lesbians experience in every country in the world. These abuses cover a wide

range of violations, including murder and other forms of violence, discriminatory legislation, employment discrimination, and denial of the freedom of expression. Fear of persecution or discrimination ensures that the vast majority of lesbians remain silent about their sexual orientation and are denied the right to determine their most basic life choices. Nearly twenty years after the first United Nations World Conference on Women, the majority of countries lack any form of legislation protecting lesbians from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

PUTTING LESBIAN ISSUES ON THE AGENDA FOR THE  
WORLD CONFERENCE

The ECE Draft Regional Platform for Action includes as one of its basic principles that the promotion, protection and realization of the human rights of women must "reflect the full diversity of women, recognizing that many women face additional barriers because of such factors as their race, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic class or status as indigenous people."

We urge the governments of the ECE Region to ensure that this diversity is reflected in both the Critical Areas of Concern and the Strategic Objectives outlined in the Platform for Action. In particular, four of the Critical Areas of Concern identified in the ECE Regional Draft Platform for Action, along with their corresponding Strategic Objectives, should be revised to include lesbian-specific language: (1) Insufficient promotion of the human rights of women, (2) Feminization of poverty, (3) Insufficient de facto gender equality in employment and economic opportunity and insufficient policies and measures to reconcile employment and family responsibility, and (4) Insufficient participation of women in public life. Specific recommendations for these four areas are included below.

This preparatory meeting should affirm that the agenda

of the Fourth World Conference on Women will include the human rights of lesbians. At the Conference, Governments should commit to taking action to make those rights a reality. Governmental delegations should include lesbians, and lesbian organizations should be accredited to participate as non-governmental organizations in the Conference.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ECE HIGH-LEVEL PREPARATORY MEETING:

We urge the Governments of the ECE Region to include lesbian-specific language in the following four Critical Areas of Concern:

Insufficient promotion of the human rights of women:

- Governments should repeal all national laws that discriminate against lesbians, including "public decency" laws that are used disproportionately against lesbians and gay men.
- Governments should enact laws and policies to ensure the human rights of lesbians in economic, social, cultural, civil, and political life. Lesbian partnerships should be afforded the full protection of the law in the areas of pension and inheritance rights, taxation and social security, custody rights, adoption rights, access to donor insemination, and equal treatment with regard to freedom of movement and immigration.
- Governments should ensure that all girls have access to truthful, informative, and bias-free education on all issues relating to sexuality. Information about lesbianism should be included in all sex education curricula.
- Governments should recognize that lesbians have the

right to receive health care free of judgment or discrimination. Lesbians should be included in all public health campaigns, including AIDS education. Lesbians should not be subject to any form of persuasion or coercion from health care providers, teachers, or anyone else to undergo alteration "therapy" for their sexual orientation.

- Governments should take action against the perpetrators of violence against lesbians, and should implement public education campaigns to eliminate the prejudice and intolerance that enables such violence to occur.

Feminization of poverty:

- Governments should recognize that lesbians are particularly vulnerable to poverty due to job discrimination and the fact that lesbians often lack the financial support of family members.

Insufficient gender equality in the access to employment and insufficient policies and measures for reconciling employment and family life:

- Governments should pass legislation protecting lesbians from discriminatory hiring and employment practices. Lesbians should be protected against workplace harassment on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Insufficient participation of women in public life:

- Governments should take steps to counter the invisibility of lesbians in public life, and should recognize that widespread societal prejudice severely constrains the ability of lesbians to participate in civic and political life.
- Governments should recognize that the media are integral to forming public opinions about lesbians. Governments

should take steps to ensure that lesbians have equal access to the media to secure fair, accurate, and diverse portrayals of lesbians.