

The Declaration of Podgorica

We, the group of regional and international experts gathered to participate at the first international academic conference in the Balkans to consider the rights of sexual minorities under the title of

Justice in the Balkans: Equality for Sexual Minorities

held October 23 to 26, 2009 in Podgorica, Montenegro,

declare that our vision is to create a world in which there is

Equality for All People

in all countries. Therefore, we commit ourselves to the goals and principles set out in this Declaration. We call on all governments and societies within the Balkans to support these goals and principles as essential requirements under international law, and critical elements in the development of harmonious, democratic and prosperous societies within Europe.

1. We reaffirm the principle of the universality of human rights as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 of which proclaims that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” without exception.
2. We will promote and affirm the principle of non-discrimination, which requires that human rights apply equally to every human being regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
3. We affirm and defend the human right of every person, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, to participate fully, equally and openly in every part of life without fear of physical harm or discrimination. These rights are a fundamental part of international law and are safeguarded by a variety of international instruments to which Balkan countries are signatories.
4. We acknowledge and affirm that sexual minorities are a legitimate part of all national cultures in all societies, including Balkan societies. We acknowledge and affirm that such sexual minorities do not pose any threat to their societies, but on the contrary, they enrich their societies. We acknowledge and affirm that homosexuality is not a mental illness. We acknowledge and affirm that the social problems of homophobia and transphobia are real threats to democratic societies. Homophobia and transphobia are regrettably present in all countries, including the countries of the Balkans.
5. We will promote and affirm attitudes of tolerance, acceptance and harmony in all societies. We recognize that the strongest international treaties and most well-crafted laws will not be sufficient to safeguard the rights of sexual minorities in the Balkans. The law can play a role in achieving social change, especially by creating an environment where sexual minorities feel free to live their lives openly. However, true acceptance of sexual minorities requires an evolution in social attitudes.

6. We acknowledge that the work of achieving justice in the Balkans must primarily be the work of the people of the Balkans, but affirm that people everywhere in the world have a duty to support that struggle on the principle that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
7. We will support the equality of genders as a cornerstone of equality for sexual minorities, and will support the pursuit of higher education in gender studies.
8. We will work to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence in the Balkan countries by ensuring both adequate legal prohibitions and the consistent use of effective enforcement mechanisms to guard against and respond to such acts.
9. We will foster dialogue on and participate in the process of transforming negative social perspectives on issues of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, and support inclusiveness for all people.
10. We recognize that the rule of law and healthy democratic institutions are vital for the full protection and enjoyment of all human rights. We recognize that many Balkan countries are democracies in transition, and are emerging from difficult circumstances. We will work to strengthen democratic development and the creation of open societies in the Balkan countries and support their greater integration into Europe.
11. We will encourage and work with the governments of the Balkan countries to achieve equal rights and afford equal opportunities to all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We call on the elected and other government officials of all Balkan countries to demonstrate leadership in their societies by working to end discrimination by both words and actions. We condemn all negative statements made by political leaders that negate the existence of indigenous sexual minorities, which characterize them as a social problem or which seek to blame sexual minorities themselves for the hatred and violence directed at them by others.
12. We will work to increase awareness in the Balkans of international and European standards, legal structures and social practices regarding issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. We believe that accession to the European Union offers great hope for both improved prosperity and a deeper commitment to a democratic culture of human rights for all Balkan countries.

For the Conference:

Dr. Jovan Kojičić
Chair of the Conference

Douglas Elliott
Chair of the Conference Council
