



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
THE PRESIDENT**

**Brussels, 17 May 2011  
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**Statement by  
President Herman Van Rompuy  
on the International Day Against Homophobia (17 May)**

Since 2004, the 17 May has been marked as International Day Against Homophobia. It is the day that, in 1990, the World Health Organisation finally removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

Last December, on Human Rights Day, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon declared: "When individuals are attacked, abused or imprisoned because of their sexual orientation, we must speak out." He added: "Yes, we recognize that social attitudes run deep. Yes, social change often comes only with time. Yet, let there be no confusion: where there is tension between cultural attitudes and universal human rights, universal human rights must carry the day."

I can fully endorse the Secretary General's statement.

We in the European Union can take some pride in being at the vanguard of combating homophobia. In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam enabled (and implicitly mandated) the EU to adopt legislation to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation, alongside other grounds.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights became binding on the European institutions and mandatory in the field of EU law. This Charter prohibits discrimination based on a number of grounds, specifically including sexual orientation among them.

Combating homophobia is thus enshrined in the EU's founding act and statement of values. It is something that distinguishes Europe from many other parts of the world.

We are inspired by the sense for human dignity and the uniqueness of each person. Everyone deserves equal chances in life.

**P R E S S**

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It represents European values at their best:

- accepting difference, not fearing it;
- living with diversity, not fleeing it;
- defending rights and responsibilities, not ignoring them.

Of course, much still needs to be done, both in Europe and other parts of the world, to ensure that these mean more than empty words.

In particular, when individuals are victims of discrimination, attacked, abused or imprisoned because of their sexual orientation or other reasons, we must speak out. Such attacks do not just affect the individual victims - they are attacks on all of us. They devastate families. They pit one group against another, dividing larger society.

We have a collective responsibility to stand against discrimination, to defend our fellow human beings and our fundamental principles.

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