

SALZBURG GLOBAL LGBT* FORUM: COMING TOGETHER IN TIMES OF COVID-19

April 10, 2020

Forum Chair Klaus Mueller

** LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. We are using this term as it is currently widely used in human rights conversations on sexual orientation and gender identity in many parts of the world, and we would wish it to be read as inclusive of other cultural concepts, contemporary or historical, to express sexuality and gender, intersex and gender non-conforming identities.*

INTRODUCTION

The meeting was the first of its kind to develop stronger online engagement of our Salzburg Global LGBT* Forum Fellows during the COVID-19 emergency *through video communication*. It really was a pleasure to see everyone and to learn about how we are dealing with our daily lives, isolation and work projects. And while it was not an onsite meeting, seeing everyone created and renewed a sense of union among the participants and facilitated learning more on how things are in the different parts of the world.

FELLOWS' PERSPECTIVES

Four perspectives framed our conversation on how we experience that we all are in lockdown, both individually and as a community:

PERSONAL

Where we rediscover ourselves being in one space for a long time, and those who share this space: Many of us struggle with working from home, isolation, economic worries, and the insecurity of how long this will continue. But we also adapt and communicate digitally more and more.

- Everyone shared their personal lock-down situation that disconnects them from friends, their families of choice and larger LGBT networks. These personal exchanges offered concrete information on the different situations we are in, regarding housing,

food, access to health care or sharing spaces with family. While we all are under lockdown, it affects us differently pending our economic, social, housing, relationship, age or health situation. Hearing other strategies of adopting helped to connect to each other and understand how different and similar the situation is we are all in.

- **Olga Lenkova** (Russia/UK) informed us about her coaching service she is offering pro bono. Here is the direct link to the database for all participating coaches who offer pro bono sessions now: <https://bit.ly/supporthavencoaches> and more info on this page: [Support Haven - Coaching to Get Through This Together](#). Olga shares this with the Global LGBT Forum as an offer.

SOCIAL

Where we rethink the social inequalities the COVID-19 crisis has deepened: unequal access to health, food, health, technological access, exemplified in the higher death rates of social minorities.

- **Sudeshan Reddy** (South Africa) shared his experience as part of the UNICEF crisis management team in Pretoria where he is working with fund raisers to provide handwashing stations, with corporates to fund meals for children, and with social media platforms to counteract fake news.
- **Lee Badgett** (United States) raised the issue of the economic impact and is reaching out through the Forum's network to start a new research project, discussing it with Mariano Ruiz, Argentina, and Kasha Nabagesera, Uganda.
- **Mark Pachter** (United States) shared how it is living in New York during the COVID-19 crisis and how it becomes more and more evident that especially the African-American and Latino Communities are affected by the crisis, both in a disproportionate higher death rate and economically.
- **Sukhdeep Singh** (India) and **Fatema Bhajji** (Pakistan) shared how COVID-19 is affecting their countries and how different social minorities are stigmatized. We also talked about if and how stigmatization increases in countries where LGBT communities and/or ethnic minorities already are in difficult positions.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Where we try using technology and social media platforms to reach out, build networks, produce art or video projects and where "Everybody wants to talk to everybody."

- **Bisi Alimi** (Nigeria/UK) has started to work on a series online about COVID-19, with sessions on mental health (anxiety about catching the virus, surviving rate) and is planning one about fake news. He is currently training to become an executive coach.
- **Joe Wong** (Singapore/Thailand) is working with healthcare providers to offer mental health support, group therapies and support livelihood to trans individuals. Additionally, he is working on collaborative video projects producing short sequences

every day during quarantine that then will be stitched together (He will share it with us once ready)

- **Bao Chau** (Vietnam) works on a video production about queer people in Vietnam.
- **Cha Roque** (Philippines) started a video collaboration online: 10-day telethon to raise funds for testing kits for coronavirus.
- **Lieu Anh Vu** (Vietnam/Thailand) emphasized the relevance of regular communication in this crisis if we strive to develop collective action to help each other.

LGBT EQUALITY

Where we monitor how the coronavirus affects LGBT communities in diverse forms:

- **Saskia Wieringa** (Indonesia/Netherlands) shared her analysis of the increasingly difficult situation in Indonesia for LGBT people and communities and shared with us info about the Sage Handbook of Global Sexualities that she co-edited (see: <https://forsea.co/ban-in-extramarital-and-gay-sex-postponed-in-indonesia/>; <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/CreepingCriminalisation-eng.pdf>); 2019 Criminalisation of Homosexuality in Indonesia: The Role of the Constitution and Civil Society. Australian Journal of Asian Law, 2019, Vol 20 No 1, Article 17: 1-19.
- **Joe Wong, Saskia Wieringa** and others shared that trans communities have more difficulties to access health system during this crisis, especially in countries where they are criminalized and/or suffer from social discrimination
- **Mariano Ruiz** (Argentina) is working to provide support/food to LGBTIQ refugees and he started working with the World Bank SOGI team on a paper on LGBT and intersection with COVID-19 in Argentina. Clifton Cortez who heads the team as the World Bank's Global Adviser on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and core team member Dominic Koehler are both Salzburg Global LGBT Forum Fellows.
- **Klaus Mueller** (Germany) expressed his concern that borders in this crisis are presented as a solution to protect a nation while we depend more than ever on global cooperation to find and distribute a cure. Will hyper-nationalism be used to raise borders in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, for example with demands for human rights equality worldwide?
- **Marc Pachter** (USA) talked about blaming as a social reaction to the COVID-19 crisis. When societies react on the COVID-19 crisis with blaming others along geographic or ethnic lines and finger pointing at social minorities, refugees, and other nationalities, our lives are affected. This blaming game could be a major challenge for a world dealing long-term with COVID-19.

We started to discuss a number of questions:

- Some governments use the crisis to crack-down on social minorities and limit their access to the health and legal system. Will this systematic crack-down on minorities continue once the COVID-19 crisis has eased?
- Governments install monitoring systems that deeply invade and trace private movements of individuals. What does that mean on the long-term for the surveillance of citizens, including of LGBT people and communities?
- LGBT Youth who are not out, but were able to live openly with their LGBT friends are now back isolated in their families, without their friends' support. What are concepts to support them?
- We live in a monitoring period evaluating a new world emerging. How will this post-corona world look alike, in its access to equality, freedom of expression or and equal access?

CONCLUSION

AN OPPORTUNITY TO RETHINK

Being in lockdown, however, also presents an opportunity to rethink how we have conducted our work and how we can re-invent ourselves. Many expressed the need to develop new capacities, and a curiosity to share and hear from others what they do – sharing also being a good support against often sobering news. We can develop new online projects, we are inspired by ideas others develop, we get stronger developing new formats for regular meetings.

SOME PRACTICAL DECISIONS

Our next meeting could use Zoom for a theme-oriented discussion prepared by a smaller group (which develops main questions and statements beforehand) or guided panel discussions. A recommended time for a meeting might be 90 minutes (is Zoom the right platform)? Zoom also offers more tools we can use, such as polls or breakout rooms.

As a group, we agreed on cautiously extending future Zoom meetings with other Forum members while collecting experience what is a good size. Please send us suggestions of Fellows you would like to include in the course of our next meetings. For the next meeting on April 30 we would aim for a group of max. 20 participants and we will work on the format over the next week.

POTENTIAL KEY FOCUS TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETINGS

Based on the feed-back we received, we suggest as the key focus theme for our next meeting on **April 30, 2020 02:00 CEST TIME (Salzburg)**:

What do you identify as the most challenging impact of the COVID-19 crisis for yourself and for LGBT communities globally? Please prepare ideas how we can confront short- and long-term challenges.

We also collected additional theme proposals for future meetings as below, and we welcome off course further suggestions as we move ahead:

- In quarantine, many of us are isolated from our families of choice. How do our organizations deal with this? How can we develop stronger digital profiles and networks as a consequence?
- With an economic crisis ahead, how are our organizations surviving, and develop solutions for working within our support communities, including those for migrants and refugees?