

Hundreds of faith leaders say "conversion therapy" must end

Nearly 400 religious figures from 35 countries call for an end to therapies aimed at helping homosexuals convert to heterosexuality



Nearly 400 religious leaders signed a joint statement calling for a ban on "conversion therapies." (Photo by ASDF/STOCK.ADOBE)

Caroline Celle, France, *La Croix International*, 18 December 2020

Nearly 400 religious leader from around the world have issued a statement calling for an end to so-called "conversion therapy", which is aimed at helping homosexuals become heterosexual.

"All human beings of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions are a precious part of creation and are part of the natural order," said the new statement, which was published on December 16 by the "Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives". The text was signed by Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Sikh religious leaders.

It calls for a ban on "conversion therapies", which are supposed to transform a person's sexual orientation in the name of faith.

It also demands an end to the criminalization of homosexuality, which is still in force in some countries.

A Nobel Peace Prize signatory

Among the signatories is the retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu who was a co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize alongside Nelson Mandela for their fight against apartheid.

Ireland's former president, Mary MacAleese, also signed the statement. A practicing Catholic who studied canon law in Rome after her term as president, MacAleese has repeatedly denounced her Church's stance on homosexuality.

The joint statement was issued by the British Ozanne Foundation, which works with religious organizations internationally to promote the inclusion of homosexual and transgender people in faith communities.

It was also followed by a day-long conference broadcast online with several high-ranking religious representatives and activists. They included Anglican Bishop Paul Bayes of Liverpool and Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

"We ask forgiveness"

Most of the religious leaders who signed the statement against "conversion therapy" are from English-speaking countries.

"We ask for forgiveness from those whose lives have been damaged and destroyed on the pretext of religious teaching," they write. They lament that some believers have helped create "oppressive systems that fuel intolerance, perpetuate injustice and result in violence" within religions.

"Conversion therapies" or "restorative therapies" have been promoted primarily within certain Christian communities. They were banned from the medical field in the 1970s, but are still very common in Africa and the United States, and more discretely in Europe.

A documentary that was aired in 2019 on the "Arte" television network brought to light the existence of psycho-spiritual sessions organized by religious communities in France, Spain and Germany.

The Anglican Church divided

A dozen countries are now trying to pass legislative measures to put an end to this, according to a February 2020 report by the British-based organization ILGA World ("International Lesbian and Gay Association").

The report noted that only three countries in the world had laws that restrict these therapies.

Several senior Anglican Church leaders have worked to have these "therapies" outlawed.

The Church of England's General Synod passed a resolution in 2017 calling for a ban on this practice, and another was passed recognizing "the need for transgender people to be welcomed and supported in their parish church".

But the issue of homosexuality is still highly controversial within the Anglican Communion, where some bishops now perform gay marriages against the opinion of the majority.