

29 June 2019

Save the Children Philippines' Statement for the Pride March

Save the Children believes in the fundamental right of every child to have a childhood that is safe, healthy, and free from discrimination. All children must enjoy their rights regardless of economic status, ethnicity, religion; and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE).

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Philippines must uphold this right in all its policies, programs and decision-making processes.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment No. 20 emphasizes the rights of all adolescents to freedom of expression and respect for their physical and psychological integrity, gender identity and emerging autonomy. It condemns the imposition of so-called “treatments” to try to change sexual orientation and forced surgeries or treatments on intersex adolescents. It urges States to eliminate such practices, repeal all laws criminalizing or otherwise discriminating against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status and adopt laws prohibiting discrimination on those grounds. States should also take effective action to protect all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex adolescents from all forms of violence, discrimination or bullying by raising public awareness and implementing safety and support measures.

Nevertheless, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, queer and intersex (LGBT+) children continue to experience discrimination and violence in different forms in their schools, communities, online, and even in their own homes where they should feel the most cared for and protected.

The 2016 Philippine National Baseline Study on Violence against Children (NBS-VAC) revealed that LGBT+ children are more at risk of experiencing physical violence (at 75 percent compared to 65.9 percent among heterosexual males and 61.8 percent among heterosexual females), psychological violence (at 78.5 percent compared to 63.7 percent and 60 percent among heterosexual males and females respectively), and sexual violence (at 33.8 percent compared to 28.8 percent and 21.4 percent among heterosexual males and females respectively).^[1]

In a consultation conducted in 2016 with children on the situation of LGBT+ children, children stated that they are bullied and extorted money from in schools and communities, ridiculed, humiliated, threatened with bodily harm/with weapon, mauled, sexually harassed, and abused physically, verbally and sexually and rejected by their families. ^[2]

SOGIE was also identified as one of the drivers of violence against children in the Philippines according to the 2016 Systematic Literature Review of the Violence against Children.^[3]

LGBT+ children suffer different forms of discrimination on a daily basis in schools, in communities and even in their homes where they should feel most protected and loved. Many are bullied, physically and sexually abused only because they chose to be who they really are. Their right to self-expression has been violated in many ways. Cases of violence against LGBT children are often not acted on and are even viewed sometimes as justifiable because gender identity and expressions that deviate from the “norm” are believed to be wrong, and need to be corrected through punishments.

However, the consequence of these experiences are serious. Those who are discriminated and abused suffer from low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness particularly those who

were rejected or do not receive support from their families. These can sometimes lead to low academic performance, dropping out of school, increased risk for alcohol and substance abuse, and sometimes to suicide. [4]

Children do not deserve to be treated this way. This has to stop NOW!

Save the Children, therefore, calls on the government to pass the Anti-Discrimination Act that seeks to: (1) institutionalize programs against any form of discrimination on the basis of SOGIE, (2) institutionalize the training of Local Council for the Protection of Children officials and other relevant government officials about LGBT+ needs, (3) strengthen child protection mechanisms to protect LGBT+ children from violence, and (4) strengthen the proper implementation of the Anti-Bullying Act.

We call on the (4) Department of Education to sustain its efforts to promote and protect the rights of LGBT+ persons in the schools by adopting clearer policy guidelines to sensitize the school community and prevent and address discrimination and abuse of LGBT+ children as well as school personnel; and (5) to monitor and intensify support to schools for the implementation of the DepEd Order 40, series of 2012, or Child Protection Policy.

We also call on parents, teachers and caregivers to respect the rights of LGBT+ children and provide them with the understanding, love and support that they need as much as any other children. Lastly, we call on everyone to work together to end all forms of discrimination against LGBT+ children by providing them with safe and loving communities.

[1] Council for the Welfare of Children Philippines (2016). *National baseline study on violence against children: Philippines: Executive Summary*. Manila, Philippines: Author.

[2] ASEAN SOGIE Caucus and the Civil Society Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Proceedings of "Bata at ang Bahaghari: Children's Workshop on the Rights of LGBT Children," conducted on April 20-21, 2016 at the University Hotel, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

[3] Child Protection Network (2016). *A Systematic Literature Review on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children: Philippines: Executive Summary: Author*.

[4] "Widespread Discrimination Continues to Shape LGBT People's Lives in Both Subtle and Significant Ways." Available on: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2017/05/02/429529/widespread-discrimination-continues-shape-lgbt-peoples-lives-subtle-significant-ways/>

NOTE TO EDITOR:

This year, for the first time, Save the Children Philippines will send an official contingent to the Pride March. We are joining the Pride March in behalf of children who are discriminated, bullied, ridiculed, hurt, and abused because of their sexual orientation, gender identification and expression (SOGIE). We will make their presence felt and voices heard in line with our mandate of promoting respect for children's rights and ensuring child protection.

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