UN GLOBE
UNITED NATIONS

Friday, 6 June 2014

Dear Mr. Li,
Director General, UNIDO

The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is now past us. It is celebrated every May 17 to mark the day in 1990 when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. If you were not able to release a statement on or before this day, we hope you will consider adding your voice next year, and join numerous world leaders in commemorating this day.

At the same time, we hope you will not forget that homophobia and transphobia are very real problems in the UN workplace. From Ghana to Indonesia, from Iraq to Kosovo, from Kuwait to Uganda, we have heard from staff who feel isolated and lonely where they serve, who fear revealing who they love or their gender identity because they fear they will be targeted and their careers harmed. This fear that disclosure will harm careers is prevalent even in headquarters duty stations such as New York or Geneva. At times, particularly in countries where homosexual acts are illegal, staff fear for their safety. They are pleading for support, and for a clear message from the top that homophobia and transphobia will not be tolerated in the workplace, and that there will be consequences.

We would therefore like to ask you to issue a clear statement against homophobia and transphobia in the workplace, making it clear that there is no place for discrimination anywhere in UNIDO. We ask also that you make clear that managers have a responsibility in ensuring that homophobic and transphobic incidents are addressed. Your message would be extremely empowering to LGBTI staff.

We would further ask you to ensure that this message gets widely distributed to every single staff serving under you, from those serving at headquarters to those serving in the most remote field duty station.

The fax sent out in April by the Department of Field Support to all its peacekeeping missions is a model we believe can be effective. (Attached.)

We believe that your statement would be a crucial step in the right direction.

Ultimately, in order to vanquish discrimination, we believe that a diversity strategy is key. As is addressing inequalities in staff benefits and rights.

It is in this context that lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex staff members have to be understood. Not as staff members seeking special status, but as staff members serving under one UN family that is inclusive of all, regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. As staff members who are entitled to equal rights like all staff do. At present time, this is not the case when it comes to pension rights, for example.

As part of a diversity strategy, trainings and workshops that address LGBTI issues are key. Ignorance, which is at the root of many of the homophobic and transphobic comments made, has to be dispelled.

Also important in a diversity strategy is institutional support in the form of a focal point, or established office, which can address the many issues that are bound to come up, such as allowing trans individuals, both visitors and staff, to use public restrooms according to their self-identified gender.

And as part of the fight against discrimination, the UNJSPF has to begin honoring the *married (or equivalent)* designation granted by your human resources personnel to your staff members. For this to happen, we need your support in ensuring that the interpretation of articles 34 and 35 of the UNJSPF Regulations and Rules is fully consistent with your employment and benefits policy. This is particularly important if your organization recognizes or will recognize a staff member's personal status on the basis of the law of the jurisdiction in which that staff member's marriage or domestic partnership was celebrated or registered rather than on the basis of the law of the staff member's country of nationality. At the very least, we need your support in ensuring that at the upcoming Pension Board meeting in July, the decision is taken to keep this issue on the agenda.

As the staff group representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex staff members of the UN system, we are in a good position to help. We have a good sense of developments across the UN system. We know which agencies, funds, and programmes have taken concrete steps, and which we would like to encourage to do more.

We believe, for example, that UNDP's draft diversity strategy is a model to be followed. We are working with the UN Secretariat to develop trainings and workshops that can be deployed in all headquarters and field duty stations. We have seen the benefits that ensue when senior leaders such as the Executive Director of WFP declares her unambiguous support for the rights of LGBTI staff. And we continue to argue that it is unfair for the UNJSPF to not automatically grant *married (or equivalent)* status to staff members designated as such by their employers. No staff member should have to go from being considered partnered on the last day of

employment, to being considered single: not because the bond of his or her relationship has changed, but simply because UNJSPF has so decided.

UN-GLOBE stands ready to share all these initiatives with you and be part of any working group to address homophobia and transphobia, to institute a diversity strategy, and to discuss inequalities in pension rights.

For now, we ask that you issue a clear statement against discrimination towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex staff members in the UNIDO workplace, and that managers will be held accountable. That you give serious consideration to a diversity strategy. And that you support us in ensuring that the UNJSPF honours any personal status your Organization has granted to its staff. Or at least maintaining this issue on the agenda of the Pension Board.

A UN system that believes in human rights should ensure that its own staff are able to exercise their human rights. This was the message sent to us on 31 March 2014 by the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management Yukio Takasu, on behalf of the Secretary-General.

We believe this fully. Non-discrimination and equality must be established for all staff. All staff must enjoy dignity at work.

We ask for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,

Hyung Hak Nam (Alfonso)
President, UN-GLOBE