



NEW GENERATION  
Humanitarian NGO



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Մարդասիրական ՀԿ

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#### **FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION:**

### **Organisers forced to cancel LGBT Christian Forum in Yerevan, Armenia amidst violence and death threats**

**The European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups and the “New Generation” Humanitarian NGO (Yerevan, Armenia) are forced to announce the cancellation of this year’s Forum of LGBT Christians of Eastern Europe and Central Asia that was due to take place in Yerevan on 15-18 November 2018. We are deeply distressed and disappointed that political violence, death threats, and vandalism directed at LGBTI people are constituting a genuine threat to the safety of our participants.**

#### **Background to the event**

The Forums (conferences) of LGBT Christians of Eastern Europe and Central Asia have taken place since 2004 in various countries of the region (Ukraine, Russia, Estonia, Moldova, Romania). The event brings together around 60-70 LGBTI persons of faith, activists, church ministers, and psychologists for several days of intensive networking, discussions, sharing, and prayer. In September 2017 Yerevan, Armenia was chosen as the host city for the 2018 edition.

#### **Violence and death threats against the Forum**

However, during the last several days, there has been a wave of extremist and homophobic acts in Armenia, targeted at the event. In order to maximise their chances at the upcoming elections, the political parties that have been in opposition since the Revolution of April 2018 have mobilised and radicalised right wing conservatives in the country against the group of activists that was coming to Yerevan for the Forum.

These extremists have access to resources that go beyond anything we could have expected. The “New Generation” Humanitarian NGO was forced to suspend its activity, its director’s car was vandalised, and its members are being followed by aggressors hoping to find out the venue of the Forum. Forum participants have received death threats, both from politicians and from armed extremists aspiring to become “heroes of the nation” by murdering LGBTI people. Several foreign tourists were beaten up one week ahead of the Forum after being mistaken for participants. Those in the local LGBTI community are afraid for their safety and that of their loved ones. The protection offered by the police is insufficient.

In light of the information above, the European Forum and the “New Generation” have decided to cancel this year’s conference despite the meticulously hard work of the organising teams, both the local and international ones, for which we are immensely grateful. We wish to express our deep regret and grief over being forced to take this decision. Our events have always been peaceful and safe spaces and we have never sought involvement in local elections and partisan politics. Our only advocacy concern has been the host country’s track record of safety and observation of human rights.

#### **Inadequate response from Armenian government**

Besides calling for a swift and transparent investigation of the crimes of hate speech, inciting for and committing violence of the Armenian right wing radicals, we also would like to express our profound disappointment with the current government of Armenia. The recent Revolution of Love and Solidarity brought with it promises of genuine democratisation. Yet the government has taken no steps to put the

human rights of minorities on its agenda. Currently, it has offered no authentic support to the Forum and has prioritised its local political agenda over protecting this peaceful networking event. Thus, it can be seen as complicit with the evil experienced by us.

### **Call for respect for human rights**

There is a long path of democratic changes ahead for Armenia, a country that is a member of such human rights institutions as the Council of Europe, and we call on its rulers to remember that the respect and protection of all its citizens is a condition *sine qua non*. We believe in the wisdom and kindness of the people of Armenia and stand in solidarity with them in their battles. We also want to remind everyone, especially in Armenia that rightfully bears the name of the first Christian country in the world, that violence is not among the true Christian values, while acceptance, love, respect, diversity, and solidarity are.

### **Working for a better future**

Despite the regrettable cancellation of the event, we will continue to care for LGBTI persons of faith in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and firmly restate our commitment to having a presence in those regions most dangerous for LGBTI people. The conference will take place next year in an as yet unspecified country. Our fight for a better world for people of every sexual orientation and gender identity will go on and our community of rainbow people of faith will continue to flourish united in the love of God and striving for acceptance and respect of human dignity and rights everywhere.

### **Support our protest and pray for our siblings**

We call on all democratic and human rights institutions to vocally support our protest against this situation and make it known to the government of Armenia.

We also call on all churches, religious communities, and believers to devote a special time of prayer on 18 November 2018, the closing day of the now cancelled Forum, to pray for the LGBTI persons in Armenia, their safety, freedom and rights.

### **About the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups**

The European Forum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christian Groups is an ecumenical association of LGBT Christian groups in Europe. The European Forum aims to achieve equality and inclusion for LGBTI people within and through Christian churches and other religious bodies and multilateral organisations. With around 40 member groups from more than 20 countries in Europe, the European Forum works for freedom of religion for LGBTI people, for human rights, for the dignity of LGBTI people and for an affirmative discourse on human sexuality. The European Forum enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe since July 2016.

### **About the “New Generation” Humanitarian NGO**

The “New Generation” Humanitarian NGO (NGNGO) is a non-governmental organisation established in 1998. Its mission is to promote equality of rights, justice, diversity, dignity and well-being through protection of human rights and advocacy. Its activities are aimed at promoting the protection of human rights and advocacy of the society, promotion of healthcare, access to health services and HIV Prevention, providing material and non-material assistance to private individuals and legal bodies, and carrying out various effective social initiatives.

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