



REPORT ON DIGNITY INITIATIVE  
 NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE  
 JUNE 1-2, 2016



ADVANCING LGBTI  
 HUMAN RIGHTS GLOBALLY

# Acknowledgements

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Doug Kerr  
Project Lead, Dignity Initiative

Erin Aylward  
Research Lead, Dignity Initiative

# What is the Dignity Initiative?

The Dignity Initiative emerged in 2015 as a working group of Canadian civil society organizations and individuals interested in supporting the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) communities around the world.

The initial aims of the Dignity Initiative were three-fold:

1. To articulate a comprehensive Call to Action outlining how Canada can defend the human rights of LGBTI people around the world. This Call to Action was submitted to the new federal government in February, 2016. The Call to Action was based on an open letter written to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in March 2014 led by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and #EndHateLaws which was signed by over 80 civil society groups from across Canada.
2. To conduct research regarding best practices on how national governments and civil society can most effectively protect the human rights of LGBTI people around the world. Two reports were written and released in summer 2016:  
1) [Solidarity for Dignity: Insights for Canadian Organizations Working Globally to Support the Human Rights of LGBTI People](#), and 2) [Advancing Dignity: Assessing Canada's Global Action on Human Rights for LGBTI People](#).
3. To create spaces and opportunities for civil society and government officials to collaborate in efforts towards protecting the human rights of LGBT people.

## Purpose of this report

This report is a summary of the roundtable meetings held in Ottawa on June 1 and 2, 2016. The purpose of the report is to provide a review of the content and outcomes of those meetings as well as to provide a foundation for the next steps of the Dignity Initiative going forward into 2017.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau  
raising the rainbow flag on  
Parliament Hill, June 1.



# National Roundtable

As one strategy for advancing its objectives, the Dignity Initiative hosted a national, 2-day roundtable on June 1st and June 2nd of 2016 with the following objectives:

- To share and review the recommendations in the Call to Action issued in 2015
- To share the findings of the two Dignity Initiative reports and discuss what further research is needed in this area.
- To share information and ideas about the work civil society organizations across Canada are doing or could do to advance global LGBTI human rights, both in terms of public and community education here at home and solidarity work abroad.
- To develop common strategies or projects for work to be done over the next several years, including building global partnerships and undertaking research, education and public engagement here in Canada.
- To develop a broad advocacy strategy specifically in relation to the federal government in various areas related to global LGBTI human rights, such as the recommendations outlined in the Call to Action.
- To continue existing, and initiate new, engagement with both government departments and with elected officials around support for global LGBTI human rights.

In total, 56 civil society participants representing 36 organizations attended this groundbreaking national roundtable from across Canada. Participants from civil society included LGBT activists from the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and West Africa, and representatives from refugee support organizations, faith-based groups, LGBT rights organizations, international development organizations, research institutions, and Pride festivals from across Canada. Approximately 20 invited government officials also attended the second day of programming, including representatives from the Department of National Defence, the Department of Justice, Global Affairs Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Several representatives from the Canadian Human Rights Commission also attended this second day of programming.

# Agenda

The agenda for these two days was as follows:

## Day 1 - Civil Society Participants only - Full Day

- Panel Discussion on current civil society work on global LGBTI human rights (Moderator: Sandeep Prasad, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights. Panelists: Erin Aylward, Dignity Initiative; Gail Daigleish, Equitas International Centre for Human Rights Education; Helen Kennedy, Egale Canada; Kim Vance, ARC International)
- Lunch Keynote Address: Mark Bromley, Chair, Council for Global Equality (Washington, DC)
- Open Space Discussions on the following self-organized topics.
- Rainbow Flag-Raising on Parliament Hill with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
- Opening Reception - hosted by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with guest speaker, Randy Boissonnault, MP, Edmonton-Centre

## Day 2 - Civil Society Participants and Government Participants - Half-Day

- Solidarity with Global LGBTI Activists: Panel Discussion on how international LGBTI human rights groups can work with Canadian civil society (Moderator: Karim Ladak, Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention. Panelists: Carlos Idibouo, FrancoQueer; Charlot Jeudy, Kouraj [Haiti]; Kenita Placide, Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality; Maurice Tomlinson, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network; Olena Semenova, LIGA Ukraine)
- Morning Keynote Address: Karina Gould, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development and MP for Burlington, introduced by Jean Lebel, President, International Development Research Centre
- Panel Discussion with representatives of the Government of Canada on Canada and global LGBTI human rights (Moderator: Richard Elliott, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Panelists: Mark Allen, Global Affairs Canada; Steve Jaltema, Global Affairs Canada; Kathleen Nadeau, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada)
- Panel Discussion with representatives of other leading countries on foreign policy support for LGBTI human rights (Moderator: Erin Aylward, Dignity Initiative. Panelists: Randy Berry, US State Department; Trilce Gervaz, Embassy of Uruguay; Jessica Helin, Embassy of Sweden; Rochus Pronk, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands)



Table Discussion



Participants



Jessica Hedin (Embassy of Sweden, Rochus Pronk (Embassy of the Netherlands) and Erin Aylward (Dignity Initiative)



Discussion on combatting religious homophobia

# MEETINGS

International Partnership panel with Olena Semenova, Kenita Placide, Charlot Jeudy, Patricia Jean and Maurice Tomlinson





Mark Bromley (Council for Global Equality)



Svend Robinson,  
Kenita Placide and  
Danny Ramadan



Discussion on  
LGBTI Refugee  
Issues

Participants and speakers reflected on Canada's potential to become a global leader on the human rights of LGBTI people, both domestically and abroad. This meeting also provided a key opportunity for learning, sharing, building relationships, and reflecting on the opportunities as well as challenges ahead.

## Lessons from Panel Presentations and Keynotes

Below are some of the main lessons and themes that emerged during the panel presentations and keynotes:

**Intersectionality:** it is critical that we see LGBTI concerns in relation to other, intersecting forms of identity like race, gender, HIV status, ethnic origin, disability, migrant status, sex worker status, and class. This is important since LGBTI people embody many distinct identities and many marginalized identities continue to be left out of programming and policy. It is particularly important to address and acknowledge how racism (both implicit and explicit) has influenced LGBTI organizing in Canada and globally. Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge that the term "LGBTI" is itself a Western acronym that cannot adequately encompass the sexual diversity and diverse forms of gender identity/expression around the world.

**Sharing knowledge:** information sharing between civil society actors and with government is vital to effectively advancing organizations' efforts to advance the rights of LGBTI people, and too few opportunities for such knowledge exchange and networking currently exist. Many participants at the roundtable were pleased with the opportunity to meet each other and listen to government decision-makers.

**The need for more dialogue with the public sector:** this roundtable provided an opportunity for public servants and civil society leaders to interact directly with one another -- a form of exchange that had grown increasingly uncommon under the previous government. These exchanges underscored the need for more in-depth and iterative conversations, as civil society actors and government officials have much to learn about the other's work. There is a desire that these kinds of interactions can become more frequent in the years ahead.

## Insights from Open Space forums

On the afternoon of Day 1, participants were given the opportunity to self-organize around any issues of interest. Any topic could be suggested for discussion and there were 7 groups created for discussion:

- Supporting LGBTI refugees to Canada
- International assistance funding and LGBTI human rights
- Combatting religiously based homophobia globally
- Research on global LGBTI human rights issues
- Using video to tell stories of LGBTI human rights globally
- Solidarity between Canada and Ukrainian LGBTI communities
- Convening a national conference in Montreal at Canada Pride 2017

Below we offer a brief summary of the themes that emerged from the discussions:

**LGBTI refugees:** The obstacles facing LGBTI refugee claimants are considerable, and significant work and awareness-raising is necessary for this work to really take shape. Sensitivity training for asylum decision-makers within the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, as well as here in Canada is sorely needed. Moreover, the significant barriers to exit from country, mobility, and arrival into Canada deserve greater attention.

**International assistance funding:** Funding is critical and must take on a range of different forms: we need flexible, small-scale funding that emergent LGBTI movements can access, core funding (as opposed to just project-based funding) to sustain organizations' work, and large-scale, project-based funding. (This conversation was also converted into a submission to the federal government's International Assistance Review, which can be found [here](#)).

**Solidarity with Ukrainian LGBTI activists:** it is important to help keep allies secure (not just well funded - though this also matters) on their terms. Applying political pressure, provided it's done in consultation with local activists, can be a very useful tool in the context of the Ukraine.

**Religious-based homophobia:** Government needs to restrict mobility of Canadian preachers who export homophobia; knowledge-sharing systems are needed to better document/track exporters of hate. Faith-based allies have a pivotal role to play in stopping hatred within religious communities.

**Research and using video storytelling:** Research and multimedia are both important tools within LGBTI movements; we need to promote this knowledge and these skills. LGBTI issues are seriously underfunded by universities, it is therefore important to ensure LGBTI issues are part of funding/research calls. More legitimacy and visibility is needed within academia, it is also important for research to be “on the ground” and for education to be seen as an opportunity for capacity building. Using multimedia as a way for LGBTI activists to document “our own stories” is critical and needs to be linked to funding streams.

**Canada Pride 2017:** In August 2017, activists, researchers, policy makers and the general public will convene in Montreal for a major national conference on LGBTI issues. This event is part of Canada’s sesquicentennial. Members of the Dignity Initiative will work with Fierté Montréal Pride to ensure that issues related to Canada’s role in the world are part of the conference.

## Organizers’ Lessons Learned for Future Events:

- We need to do a better job of centering voices from the global South, as well as diasporic voices. Amplifying and listening to activists from the South was a core focus of the Dignity Initiative’s “Call to Action” and should be a core concern for any individual or organization wishing to work in solidarity on the rights of LGBTI people. While we were fortunate to have a number of accomplished international and diasporic activists present during this roundtable, there could have absolutely been more such voices. Further, and more importantly, we should have taken greater efforts to ensure that a greater diversity of voices were represented as panelists and moderators.
- Similarly, greater work should be done in the future to ensure a greater diversity of Canadian delegates. More specifically, more outreach and collaboration is needed with organizations and individuals working with Aboriginal LGBTI communities, disabled LGBTI communities, and trans communities.
- We should carve out more time and space for civil society organizations to dialogue with government representatives on issues of shared concern: we believe that the depth and richness of experience represented in the room during the second day of programming could have been better leveraged with more opportunities for dialogue and interaction among participants.

- We should carve out more time for people to share their work with each other: with just one and a half days of programming, every minute matters, and we believe that the agenda could have been tightened to enable more time for practitioners to learn from one another.

## Participants' Feedback

Following the roundtable, we circulated a feedback survey to all participants. We received responses from 32 civil society participants and 3 government attendees, 27 of who responded in English, and 8 of who responded in French. Below is a summary of some of the main findings from this feedback.

### Evaluating Our Objectives

The table below highlights the number of survey respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed that we had meet each of our five objectives for the roundtable meetings. Overall, this table reflects a high level of satisfaction and a desire to continue this network. However, two objectives in particular feature lower levels of agreement and deserve greater reflection.

Objective	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Combined
I left with a stronger understanding of the Dignity Initiative's Call to Action and its two reports.	48.6%	34.3%	82.9%
I gained a deeper understanding of what Canadian civil society is doing and could be doing to advance LGBTI human rights globally.	51.4%	34.3%	85.7%
I believe that this roundtable helped develop common strategies or ideas for future projects that can be undertaken in the next several years.	42.9%	22.9%	65.8%
I believe that this roundtable helped to expand on and/or to initiate engagement between civil society, government departments and with elected officials around support for global LGBTI human rights.	65.7%	20%	85.7%
I believe that the Dignity Initiative has created spaces that are inclusive and that enable collaboration/coalition-building.	34.3%	42.9%	77.2%



Nicole Nussbaum, Andrea Houston  
and Marcella Daye (Canadian  
Human Rights Commission)

# RECEPTION



Randy Boissonnault, MP Edmonton  
Centre and Rob Oliphant, MP Don  
Valley West

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier, Minister of National Revenue, Randy Boissonnault, MP Edmonton Centre, and Hon. Kent Hehr, Minister of Veterans Affairs



Beatrice Borja, Flo Nguyen and Melanie Bejzyk



Reception





Junique Wokuri,  
Kenita Placide and  
Maurice Tomlinson



Reception

First, only 65.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this roundtable helped develop common strategies or ideas for future projects that can be undertaken in the next several years. While our roundtable provided an excellent opportunity for organizations and individuals to meet, connect, and learn more about the diversity of work that is taking place across Canada, relatively little time or space was left to strategize and identify how best to move forward together. We are hopeful that we can continue to build on the momentum as we flesh out the next steps for the Dignity Initiative moving forward.

Relatedly, 77.2% of survey respondents felt that the Dignity Initiative had created spaces that were inclusive and that enable collaboration/coalition-building. While we are encouraged that over three quarters of respondents felt that we had performed well on this objective, we believe that more work is needed to ensure that we are at once inclusive as well as able to generate opportunities for collaboration.

### **Most Significant Outcomes:**

In response to the question, “What was/where the most valuable outcome(s) of the Dignity Initiative’s roundtable for you?” virtually every respondent highlighted the value of networking, learning, and engaging in conversation with other participants. For example, respondents from the refugee sector highlighted that this had been the first opportunity for many of these organizations to meet face-to-face after years of being aware of each other’s work in different parts of Canada.

A few quotes from the survey reflecting general themes from the comments::

- “Much better understanding of civil society individuals and organizations in Canada working on LGBTQ international human rights... Better understanding of federal government priorities re: LGBTQ international human rights.”
- “In person conversations with people from coast to coast working on similar issues. Opportunity for knowledge sharing was incredibly valuable.”
- “Listening to voices from the global South.”
- “Building connections with public sector and connecting to some civil society leaders who I hadn't met before.”

- “Meeting so many amazing and people who are all committed to the work. Also really like the open space concept.”
- “Learning more about the work of fellow Canadians. Also, the connection with government was good, could have been stronger, but a good start.”
- “Meeting with people in my shared sector, LGBTI refugees. We rarely have the ability to collaborate nationally though we have similar goals and challenges. I was glad to be able to share ethics policies and to set up collaboration on cases.”

One unexpected outcome of the event was the raising of the rainbow flag on Parliament Hill. Randy Boissonnault, Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Heritage was a guest speaker at the Dignity Initiative reception hosted by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and he coordinated this flag raising with the Prime Minister and members of all political parties to mark Pride Month on the first day of the roundtable meetings.

### **Next steps for the Dignity Initiative:**

In response to a question about whether or not the Dignity Initiative should continue to exist following this roundtable, respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of some continued iteration of this initiative, with **94.3% of respondents indicating “yes” and 5.7% indicating that they were unsure, and 0 respondents saying “no”**. Thus, the original Dignity Initiative Working Group will be developing a proposal for a pilot national network related to Canada and human rights for LGBTI people globally.

### **Looking forward**

Attendees provided a range of ideas around what they hoped would follow for the Dignity Initiative. Below is a summary of some of the main themes to emerge in participants’ responses:

- Need/potential for sustained collaboration: overwhelmingly attendees indicated interest in working together to support Canadian engagement on global LGBTI human rights issues. Considerable enthusiasm was expressed for maintaining, strengthening, and utilizing the networks developed before and during the roundtable.
- Continued networking: Pride Montreal - Canada Pride 2017 will be hosting a major national LGBTI human rights conference in August 2017. Dignity Initiative has been invited to help formulate the conference component on

Networking



Reception





Randy Barry, US Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons



Keynote Address from Karina Gould, Member of Parliament for Burlington and Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of International Development

Canada and LGBTI issues globally and LGBTI refugees and this will be an important venue to follow-up on the Dignity Initiative's Call to Action and 22 recommendations to the Government of Canada.

- Striving to apply an intersectional approach in collaboration within civil society and institutions: ensuring that LGBTI concerns are analyzed alongside issues of gender, race, religion, and other forms of marginalization.
- The need to advocate for funding, particularly from the Canadian government. Most of civil society's current work on these issues does not receive funding from the Canadian government. The network indicated the need to come together to review discussions and explore structural models for collaboration and/or communication. Most Canadian LGBTI solidarity work is done through funding from European governments or through volunteer efforts. (It is important to note that since the roundtable meetings in June, the Dignity Initiative participated in Global Affairs Canada's International Assistance Review. Please see [Supporting Dignity: The Role of LGBTI Rights and Sexual Rights in Canada's International Assistance](#) for our report submitted to Affairs Canada on July 30.)
- Developing a space to connect practitioners to research and to share best practices around ways to support international solidarity related to LGBTI human rights.

Attendees were asked which of the open space groups they would be willing to continue work on if the Dignity Initiative were to continue as a network. The following numbers indicated the number of attendees interested in participating in potential network working groups:

1. Increasing funding for LGBTI work within Canada's international development assistance: 20
2. Supporting LGBTI refugees: 19
3. Bringing Canadian foreign policy and refugee issues into Fierté Canada Pride's Human Rights Conference in 2017: 17
4. Research on LGBTI human rights globally: 14
5. Confronting religious-based homophobia in Canada and abroad: 10
6. Solidarity with Ukrainian LGBTI activists: 6
7. Using video to tell stories related to LGBTI people globally: 5

Other working group topics suggested: 1) Solidarity development with activists in the global south and 2) Coordinating national advocacy with federal government.



Rex Fyles, facilitator



Doug Kerr (Dignity Initiative) and Marie-Pier Boisvert (Conseil LGBT québécois)



LGBT and allied parliamentarians at the flag raising

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# Annex: Dignity Initiative Roundtable Attendees

## **Civil Society Participants & Organizations**

Alex Kennedy, Amnesty International Canada  
Althea-Maria Rivas, International Development Research Centre  
Andrea Houston, #EndHateLaws  
Arsham Parsi, Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees  
Bradley Colin Smith, Affirm United  
Rev. Brent Hawkes, Metropolitan Community Church Toronto  
Carlos Idibouo, FrancoQueer  
Charlot Jeudy, Kouraj (Port-au-Prince, Haiti)  
Corrie Melanson, Rainbow Refugee Association Nova Scotia  
Danny Ramadan, Refugee Activist, Vancouver  
Dominique Laverne, Fierté Montréal Pride  
Doug Kerr, Dignity Initiative Project Lead  
El-Farouk Khaki, El-Tawhid Juma Circle Mosque  
Erin Aylward, Dignity Initiative Research Lead  
Frédéric Hareau, Equitas - International Centre for Human Rights Education  
Gail Dalgeish, Equitas - International Centre for Human Rights Education  
George Harvey, Amnesty International Canada  
Heather Hay, Fierté Canada Pride  
Helen Kennedy, Egale Canada  
Jean-Thomas Houle, Comité de Solidarité Trois-Rivières  
Jenni Leslie, Affirm United  
Jim Hodgson, United Church of Canada  
Jonathan Niemczak, Pride Winnipeg  
Junic Wokuri, Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights  
Karlene Williams-Clarke, 519 Church St Community Centre  
Kate Lazier, Rainbow Railroad  
Kelly Bowden, Oxfam Canada  
Kelly L'Archevêque, Fierté Montréal Pride  
Kenita Placide, Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality  
Kris Wells, Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, University of Alberta  
Lisa Hébert, Capital Rainbow Refuge  
Marie-Pier Boisvert, Conseil québécois LGBT  
Mark Bromley, Council for Global Equality (Washington, DC)  
Maurice Tomlinson, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
Melanie Bezyk, Masters Candidate, Oxford University  
Michelle Emson, Kyiv Pride Canada  
Nancy Nicol, Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights  
Olena Semenova, LIGA Ukraine  
Patricia Jean, Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique  
Phyllis Waugh, Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights  
Richard Elliott, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
Sandeep Prasad, Action for Sexual Health and Rights  
Sarah Kennell, Action for Sexual Health and Rights  
Sharlayn Jordan, Rainbow Refugee Committee Vancouver

Sylvain Pinet, Comité de Solidarité Trois-Rivières  
Ted Jackson, The MacLeod Group  
Troy Jackson, El-Tawhid Juma Circle Mosque  
Valérie Lapointe, Conseil québécois LGBT  
Vicky Smallman, Canadian Labour Congress  
Wariri Mukungi, MATCH International  
William Hébert, Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar  
Yuvraj Joshi, Human Rights Watch

## **Government Participants**

Ashley Crossley, Governance Specialist, Global Affairs Canada  
Cédéric Héroux, Junior Advocacy Officer, Mission Support Unit, Global Affairs Canada  
Élene Bérubé, Counsel, Human Rights Law, Department of Justice  
Flo Nguyen, Advocacy Strategist, Mission Support Unit, Global Affairs Canada  
Kathleen Nadeau, Assistant Director, Monitoring, Analysis and Country Assessment Division, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada  
Marcella Daye, Senior Policy Advisor, Canadian Human Rights Commission  
Mark Allen, Executive Director, Human Rights and Indigenous Affairs Policy, Global Affairs Canada  
Marilyn Cormier, Senior Policy Advisor, Commonwealth & Francophone Division, Global Affairs Canada  
Michelle Douglas, Director, International Relations, Department of Justice  
Major Patrick Hannan, Directorate of Human Rights & Diversity, Department of National Defence  
Noella De Maina, Advocacy Strategist, Mission Support Unit, Global Affairs Canada  
Richard Arbeiter, Director General, Freedom and Human Rights, Global Affairs Canada  
Sharon Peake, Director, Natural Resources and Governance Division, Global Affairs Canada  
Steve Jaltema, Deputy Director, Partnerships for Development Innovation, Global Affairs Canada  
Suzanne Desjarlais, Senior Policy Advisor, Canadian Human Rights Commission  
Tabatha Tranquilla, Senior Policy Advisor, Canadian Human Rights Commission

Dignity Initiative Roundtable Participants



[dignityinitiative.ca](http://dignityinitiative.ca)



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