Joint statement on the second anniversary of the death of the lesbian and queer activist Sarah Hegazy/ WANA Lesbian and Queer Woman's Pride Day

Joint Statements · Diaspora & Exile · Egypt · 13 June 2022

The undersigned organizations and movements urge host communities to pay attention to the mental and physical health of lesbian and queer women from immigrant and refugee groups.

Monday, June 13th – Paris

Background:

Sarah Hegazy was an Egyptian lesbian and queer political activist. In 2017, Sarah was detained for three months and tortured in prison after her public appearance at Mashrou' Leila concert in Cairo, a band in which the singer is openly gay, waving the pride flag that symbolizes the LGBTQI+ community around the world. As a result of torture, physical and psychological abuse, bullying and social ostracism, Sarah suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, which worsened after she was forced to leave Egypt for Canada, where she faced the pain of exile, loneliness, and loss.

 On the morning of June 13, 2020, Sarah chose to leave our world, putting an end to her pain after all the oppression, injustice, hate, discrimination and torture she had been subjected to, raising concerns about the mental health issue of the LGBTQI+ community in diaspora.

Sarah Hegazy's memory

Last year, during the first anniversary of Sarah Hegazy's passing, a group of lesbian and queer feminists in addition to ANKH association, launched the first edition of Lesbian and Queer Women's Pride Day in West Asia and North Africa, and this year we are launching the Lesbian and Queer Feminist Caucus in the region, which includes a number of lesbian and queer feminists from the diaspora, and organizes a pride march for lesbian and queer women and non-binary diaspora members in Paris.

Sarah's friends, in cooperation with Outright Action International and HuMENA, launched a website, to serve as a reference for everything related to Sarah Hegazy, including photos and blogs, as well as publishing her diary in Al Qanater prison, which she always dreamed of publishing to explain her psychological suffering, from repression, torture, persecution, and the suffering of women, especially lesbians.

All these efforts come with the aim of giving impetus and visibility to lesbian and queer women in

the region and in diaspora, and perpetuating the name Sarah Hegazy.

Dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD:

LGBTQI+ people in West Asia, known as the Middle East, and in North Africa are subjected to systematic campaigns of repression, detention, and torture, forcing a large number of them to migrate in search of a safe life. Despite the support provided by the host communities to asylum seekers and new immigrants in general, in many cases, these means do not correspond to the needs of LGBTQI+ people in exile.

LGBTQI+ people suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, as a result of successive traumas, including persecution and discrimination by their governments and societies in their countries of origin, and in some cases, disruption of family and social relationships as well as immigration or forced asylum and sudden displacement to a new country with a different language and culture. Post-traumatic stress disorder greatly affects the physical and psychological health of LGBTQI+ community members. It causes unstable mental states, repeatedly generating painful memories, and dangerous/negative thoughts – such as suicide, and nightmares – all of which constitute acute stress.

Language barrier

The language barrier is a major obstacle for the LGBTQI+ community in exile. Although some host communities offer free language courses, learning the language is a significant burden due to the low level of education back in the countries of origin, or the low quality of the free courses offered. This creates an additional psychological pressure factor on the exiles, leading some of them not to complete the courses.

During the early stages of the integration process into the host community, individuals find themselves in constant need of a translator to complete the administrative procedures, and in many cases, these government-provided translators are not sufficiently familiar with the topics and terminology related to the LGBTQI+ community, as the translator loses credibility, especially if they are homophobic or transphobic.

Stigma and discrimination

LGBTQI+ people are subjected to punishment, persecution and denial of their existence and their rights by our countries under dictatorial regimes, and by our societies and the labor market. Discrimination increases, in the case of lesbian and queer women, who are originally exposed to patriarchal laws and social concepts.

LGBTQI+ people are forced to resort to asylum because of all these difficulties they face, which affect their mental health, social, economic, and political status. In the country of asylum, the individual face various forms of stigma and discrimination, most of which revolve around the stereotyped image of immigrants and refugees on ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender backgrounds.

Although the host countries legally criminalize any form of stigma, discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, and racism, these cases have not yet completely disappeared from their societies and institutions. Therefore, LGBTQI+ refugees or immigrants are exposed to new difficulties in the host countries, which increases in case of LGBTQI+ women and dark-skinned people who are additionally exposed to sexism and racism... We see this, for example, with the police treating, in many cases, refugees or immigrants in a racist manner, instilling fear and mistrust among members of the LGBTQI+ community towards the police and state institutions. In addition, the difficulty of service access – for example health services – constitutes an obstacle to these individuals and makes them vulnerable to health and psychological instability. For example, LGBTQI+ people may be subjected to inappropriate, discriminatory treatment by medical staff who are insufficiently specialized in special cases, such as transgender cases.

LGBTQI+ individuals and activists in the diaspora, and pushing the rights movement

There is still a long way to go towards achieving equality for LGBTQI+ people in West Asia and North Africa. The diaspora community has the potential to push the movement forward as they are aware of the worrying social situation in their countries of origin. In addition, individuals in exile enjoy a margin of freedom that allows them to use various tools and spaces throughout their movement to improve the human rights situation.

Also, these individuals are active members of the host societies, whose governments, whether we like it or not, influence the political and economic course in the mother countries, where they have joint bilateral relations, which creates a great opportunity for effective advocacy.

Therefore, host communities must*;*

– Provide psychological support services, in individual's native language, as an essential part of the integration process and LGBTQI+ refugee's protection, and a top priority for the psychological and physical support;

– Train workers in different sectors on how to deal with LGBTQI+ refugees;

– Build the capacities of new immigrants and train them to serve their communities within the host community, and to participate in the decision-making process on issues that concern them;

– Stop supporting dictatorial regimes that oppress LGBTQI+ people and those who defend them and treat them as scapegoats;

– Make the issue of human rights and the rights of LGBTQI+ people and those who defend them a central focus of any relations and joint projects with governments in West Asia and North Africa;

Organizations and movements in the region

Coordinating with individuals and activists in exile to push the rights situation in line with LGBTQI+ priorities at home countries.

Signing organizations:

1. ANKH association (Arab Network for Knowledge about Human rights) – Euromediterranean region
2. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
3. The Egyptian-French Initiative for Rights and Freedoms
4. OutRight Action International
5. International Service for Human Rights
6. Outcasts Tunisia
7. Women's center for guidance and legal awareness
8. Tunisian association defending individual liberties ADLI
9. Il Grande Colibrì
10. Intersection Association for Rights and Freedoms
11. LGBT Arabic
12. ATYAF collective for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Morocco
13. Helem
14. ALTSEAN-Burma
15. Barra Al Sour organization
16. My Kali magazine
17. ATP+/ Mena Rosa
18. MAWJOUDIN WE EXIST
19. Queer Shia Collective
20. Fundamental human Rights & Rural Development Assoc
21. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
22. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
23. Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM)
24.

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