

## **TRANSCRIPT    Fighting Homophobia to Make Kosovo More    Free and Equal**

**[NARRATOR]**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights promises a world that is free and equal, where all people are guaranteed the same protections. But lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender -- or LGBT -- people in all regions have been subjected to violence and discrimination simply because of who they are. The United Nations is an organization that stands for the human rights of all people. That is why Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the following:

**[U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON]**

Let me say this loud and clear. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are entitled to the same rights as everyone else.

**[NARRATOR]**

Here in Kosovo, the situation remains difficult. But local civil society groups are working on the ground to change public perceptions and advance LGBT rights. Lola Krasniqi is the Executive Director of the Center for Social Emancipation, or QESH, an organization that was founded in 2005 to create a safe space for Kosovo's LGBT community.

**[LOLA KRASNIQI, QESH]**

Homophobia is very present in Kosovo. The LGBT community has been facing many difficulties. We work with Kosovar Albanians, with Serbs, with the Roma Ashkali Egyptian community. We don't exclude anyone. The 17th of May is the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, which is a day to show institutions that the LGBT community is here. It's not a foreign concept. Growing up as a lesbian in a Kosovar family has been very hard. My parents know but they don't want to know. It's not easy to lie. It's very hard when you sit around the family and everyone speaks about their partners, but you are not allowed or cannot express your love. I'm not expecting people to accept me. But I expect them to respect my rights, my human rights.

**[NARRATOR]**

To support the LGBT community worldwide, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has launched an unprecedented global campaign, called Free and Equal. Its goal is to raise awareness of homophobia and fight it through education. Joël Mermet heads the UN human rights office in Kosovo.

**[JOËL MERMET, U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE IN KOSOVO]**

We know that discrimination is always or very often based on fear. And fear actually originates from a total absence of knowledge. In your community, even in your village, most likely you have someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. You refuse to see it or to admit it because you fear it, because you don't know. But once you know that person, you accept him or her as part of your community. We don't ask Kosovo to accept something that is imposed on them. LGBT people were born in Kosovo before the UN arrived. So this is not something new. This is just something which has to be better accepted.

**[NARRATOR]**

As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said, the fight against homophobia is a core part of the broader battle for human rights for all. It sits alongside the UN's long-standing work to eliminate racism and promote gender equality. Ending homophobia is a matter of personal security, dignity and even survival for countless individuals. It is a long-term project but one that needs to be done so that Kosovo can be more inclusive and a safer place for all its people.