We Are Still Here: LGBTI Persons and their Human Rights

Thursday, 19 March 2026, 10:00am-11:15am

UN Headquarters, CR 8,

Background

The year 2025 has unfolded in a complex and challenging global context for LGBTI movements. Across regions, long-standing struggles for equality and justice are taking place amid tightening political environments, shrinking civic space, discriminatory laws restricting freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and criminalizing the work of LGBTI human rights defenders. Globally, a significant number of states continue to maintain - and in some cases broaden- laws that criminalize consensual same-sex relations, affecting large parts of Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia.

At the same time, LGBTI and feminist organizations are experiencing a deepening funding crisis. Grassroots movements—particularly those led by women, trans, intersex, and gender-diverse activists—receive a disproportionately small share of global human rights and gender equality funding, even as demands for protection, legal aid, and emergency support increase.

These dynamics are increasingly reflected at the multilateral level. In global forums, including within the United Nations, the language and scope of gender equality and human rights have become more contested. Efforts to narrow the meaning of equality, to exclude sexual orientation and gender identity from established frameworks, have intensified. As a result, access to multilateral spaces—long viewed as critical avenues for accountability and norm-setting—has become more fraught for activists, even as their engagement remains essential.

And yet, **we are still here**. Despite all this, LGBTI human rights defenders across regions continue to engage with justice systems, document violations, seek remedies, and build alliances. They persist in courtrooms, community justice

mechanisms, and international spaces, advancing claims not only for individual redress but for systemic change. Their continued presence underscores a central truth: access to justice is not only about laws on paper, but also about the ability of those most affected by exclusion to speak, organize, and shape the systems that govern their lives while having their rights protected.

Objective

This side event brings together LGBTI activists from different regions to share stories drawn from their own engagement with justice systems—stories that illuminate both barriers and pathways, risks and solidarities. Framed around the question *"What does justice look like?"* These testimonies affirm that, even in constrained environments, LGBTI persons cannot be erased. Their message to Member States and the international community is clear: **our rights matter, our voices belong in justice spaces, and despite everything, we are still here. RSVP HERE.**

Agenda

1. **Opening Remarks (5 mins)**
    - Maria Sjödin, Executive Director, Outright International

2. **Presentation (5 mins)**
    - Mr. Rio Hada, Chief, Equality, Development and Rule of Law Section, OHCHR New York Office

3. **Storytelling Panel (45 min):** Four LGBTIQ human rights defenders share **personal stories** and insights on accessing justice amid adversity.
    - Graeme Reid, UN Independent Expert on Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

4. **Interactive Q&A (10 min):** An open floor for questions and interventions from attendees (Member State delegates, UN entities, civil society).

5. **Closing Remarks (5 mins)**
    - H.E. Ms. Merete Fjeld Brattested, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations