



# Trans and intersex people won't be erased

Statement from Samtökin '78 – The National Queer Organisation of Iceland, Trans Iceland, Intersex Iceland and Reykjavik Pride

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Yet again a powerful nation-state attacks the rights of queer people while proclaiming itself a protector of freedom and human rights.

The latest news is that the United States Department of Health and Human Services proposes to redefine the term “sex” in relation to Title IX of the Education Amendments Act. The Department favors defining sex “on a biological basis that is clear, grounded in science, objective and administrable”, concluding that humanity should be divided permanently into men and women on the basis of genital appearance at birth. This plan demonstrates both an appalling lack of scientific and historical knowledge and a deep contempt for trans and intersex people.

The idea that all human beings can be categorized into two homogeneous biological classes, male and female, is an oversimplification suitable for the teaching of biology in elementary schools. However, it in no way reflects the richness and complexity of biological sex characteristics. On the basis of this simplification, intersex people have been all but obliterated from history and suffered cruel violations of their human rights, often by public institutions – violations that are just now beginning to see the light of day. The Department’s proposal would be a heavy blow to intersex people’s struggle for human rights, constituting yet another attempt by public authorities to erase their existence.

By the same token, no society has ever existed without gender diversity. Wherever we cast our eyes in human history, human beings have identified with a different gender than they were assigned as infants. People with diverse gender identities have always enriched human societies and cultures. It is the responsibility of each society to decide whether it responds to diversity with violence and exclusion, or with inclusion, acceptance and harmony.

This trans- and intersexphobic proposal is particularly galling in light of United States foreign policy, which includes vocal support for LGBTI rights and a willingness to censure others for human rights violations. In November 2017 the United States condemned homophobic violence in Chechnya, and this past May, on International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOTB),



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that “the United States stands with people around the world in affirming the dignity and equality of all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.” This dissonance demonstrates, at best, an appalling lack of clear policy on LGBTI rights. At worst, it is evidence of arrogance and hypocrisy.

The existence of trans and intersex people is an incontestable reality. It can never be erased with the stroke of a pen. It is not up to the United States government to decide whether trans and intersex people exist, but to decide how it will treat its citizens. The United States’ Declaration of Independence proclaims that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”. The United States are now faced with the question: will they safeguard these unalienable rights for all their citizens – or violate them?

Respectfully,

María Helga Guðmundsdóttir  
President Samtökin '78 – The National Queer  
Organisation Of Iceland

Kitty Anderson  
President Intersex Iceland

Alda Villiljós  
President Trans Iceland

Gunnlaugur Bragi  
President Reykjavík Pride