



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Mario Joseph, Av.**, Managing Attorney, *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux* (BAI), [Mario@ijdh.org](mailto:Mario@ijdh.org), +509-3701-9879 (in Haiti - speaks French and Haitian Creole)

### **The BAI denounces religious leaders' march against Haiti's LGBT community**

**(Port-au-Prince, July 17, 2013)** - As countries around the world acknowledge the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals to marry and be free from violence and discrimination, religious leaders in Haiti are organizing a march against homosexuality.

The *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux*, which works to protect the human rights of poor people, stands with Kouraj, an LGBT rights organization, to denounce the Haitian Coalition of Religious and Moral Organizations' call for a march against homosexuality, scheduled for July 19, 2013.

During a nationally televised [press conference](#) on June 25, 2013, the Haitian Coalition of Religious and Moral Organizations condemned "all laws giving support to gay marriages" and chanted, "Nou pa dakò! Nou pa dakò!" (we are "not okay" with gays). "Basically speaking, God does not agree and nor do we because we rely on God, and because we saw the misfortunes it brought to Sodom and Gomorrah. So, because we do not want to experience the same misfortunes, we are compelled to take a position," said the president of the religious coalition. The coalition includes the Protestant Federation of Haiti.

Homosexuality and transgenderism remain [taboo](#) within Haitian society, and as a result, the lives of many LGBT individuals are characterized by secrecy, isolation, discrimination, and violence. Stigmatization and discrimination against LGBT individuals have become normalized. Some [Haitian politicians and public figures](#) allege that homosexuality is foreign to Haitian culture, and by implication, LGBT rights are therefore irrelevant.

By equating the practice of homosexuality to unnatural practices and a lack of education, the religious leaders who have called for this march are undermining the work that has been done to increase tolerance of the LGBT community. Similarly, claims that homosexuality is a disease aggravates violence against the LGBT community.

LGBT groups cannot address the stigma of HIV/AIDS as long as Haitians are unable to talk freely about the patterns of behaviour within the country that are contributing to the spread of the disease. Kouraj would like to counsel openly to young LGBT people about the dangers of promiscuity and unprotected sex, but they cannot do so if LGBT people are afraid of living openly and honestly within their own communities.

LGBT Haitians are constantly threatened in person, on the Internet and across many platforms for simply being who they are. LGBT individuals are frequently [harassed](#)

by police and arrested for what appears to amount to criminalization of their basic identity. There have been increasing reports of beatings against gay men and gang rapes against lesbian women.

Discrimination against Haiti's LGBT community is in violation of the rights guaranteed by the 1987 Haitian Constitution. The Constitution guarantees all Haitians the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, consistent with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The constitution also recognises the elimination of discrimination and the acceptance of "the community of language and culture" as essential to strengthening national unity. Article 17 guarantees the political and civil rights of *all* Haitians, and Article 18 guarantees equality before the law. These articles create an obligation on the Haitian Government to act to protect any Haitians whose rights may be violated by the actions of other groups.

We call upon:

- The Government to protect the Constitutional right to life and dignity of LGBT individuals without discrimination;
- Religious leaders to cease and desist from mobilizing against the LGBT community, which undermines the rights of their fellow Haitians to live in freedom; and
- The general public to come out in support of their LGBT brothers, sisters, daughters and sons, who are only seeking the right to live in the same peace and tranquillity that they enjoy.