



## His Grace Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

### Video message for United Nations panel : *“Ending Violence and Criminal Sanctions based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity”*

Geneva, 17 September 2010

My dear friends,

Today I appeal to our common humanity. The proud ideals of the United Nations are equality, dignity and respect for all, a goal that unites us across our great diversity.

All over the world, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are persecuted. They face violence, torture and criminal sanctions because of how they live and who they love. We make them doubt that they too are children of God - and this must be nearly the ultimate blasphemy.

In South Africa, we struggled for years against the evil system of apartheid that divided human beings, children of the same God, by racial classification and then denied many of them fundamental human rights. Thankfully, the world supported us in our struggle for freedom and dignity. I am proud that in South Africa, when we finally won the chance to build a new Constitution, we included sexual orientation in our laws, because we knew from our bitter experience that an injury to one is an injury to all.

Once again, however, people are being denied fundamental rights and freedoms. Gay men have been jailed and humiliated, transgender people attacked, lesbians raped. Our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters, across Africa and elsewhere, are living in fear. And they are living in hiding -- away from care, away from the protection the State should offer to every citizen and away from health care, when all of us, especially Africans, need access to essential HIV services.

This wave of hate must stop.

Sexual orientation, like skin colour, is a feature of our diversity. How sad it is that when God's children are facing such massive problems - poverty, disease, corruption, conflict - we are so often obsessed with human sexuality. Is there not already too much hate in this world, without also seeking to persecute those who love?

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are part of so many families. They are part of the human family. They are part of God's family. And of course they are part of the African family.

You, at the United Nations, have a particular role to play. You have a responsibility. Whenever one group of human beings is treated as inferior to another, hatred and intolerance will triumph.

Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people - they are our sons and daughters, our family and friends, our colleagues and co-workers. They are equal members of the human family whose rights you have sworn to uphold.

Those who face hatred, violence and criminal sanctions look to you for leadership, they look to you for protection, they look to you for recognition of their right to equal dignity and respect.

Do not fail them.

You must stand up for the principles of universal humanity and fellowship. Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared paths to freedom and justice.