

**OPENING REMARKS
A CELEBRATION OF COURAGE
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Jessica Stern, Executive Director

“Never talk about religion, sex, politics or money.”

Thank you to everyone who is here tonight. We're really thrilled to be here together.

I want to welcome so many old friends and new, and in a short video, introduce you to Friedel Dausab, a member of the IGLHRC Africa Program Advisory Committee, describing LGBT realities on-the-ground in Namibia.

--video--

Friedel's remarks, in his clear and thorough way, set the scene for why the global LGBT rights movement needs resources. LGBT people everywhere need basic human rights.

I've been executive director of IGLHRC since 2012, and it's been an exhilarating year, during which time I've found myself in many new and unexpected situations. I've told myself, when in doubt, rely on your common sense.

And so, I'll tell you what my mother taught me, "In polite company," she says, "never talk about religion, sex, politics or money."

But *Mother's Day* was yesterday, and we're at the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission tonight. So here's hoping you've not a very polite crowd, because sex, religion, politics and money are exactly what we want to talk about!

We at the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC for short) know that law is a blunt instrument for evaluating the safety and well-being of LGBT people, but as Friedel noted, it provides a snapshot of the institutionalization of prejudice and the degree of well-being. In that spirit, let me share 3 facts that never cease to take my breath away:

First, homosexual sex is illegal in 78 countries worldwide --- which amounts to nearly half the countries of the world. These laws are concentrated in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

Second, five countries in the Middle East and North Africa punish homosexual acts at the federal level with the death penalty.

Third, recognition of one's experienced gender identity exists in only 18 countries globally. To understand just how small this number is, bear in mind that the United Nations officially recognizes 193 countries.

Given these realities, you would think that funding priorities – yes, the money part of my indiscretions tonight -- would be quite clear, right?

Well, they're not.

According to *Funders for LGBTQ Issues*, which studied the flow of resources for LGBT rights globally based on data from the last year available (2010), grants for LGBT rights initiatives outside of North America and Europe totaled just \$35 million.

To put that in perspective, the last year for which data is available indicated that the largest LGBT organization in the United States reported \$33 million in revenue.

Now, I can only pray for such riches for IGLHRC and the global LGBT movement! (And yes, that counts as my religion reference!)

But my point is to identify the unequal distribution of resources to LGBT communities around the world.

To further contextualize, North America, which has one LGBT advocacy organization (of many) with annual revenue of \$33 million, has 5% of the world's population.

Asia, with 60% of the world's population, received in a single year just \$4 million for LGBT rights. That's right, for 60% of the world's population, there was just \$4 million for LGBT rights.

Now, ready to talk politics?

Fiscal inequity is just a peek into the extraordinary inequity in people's lives.

The money is real, but it's also emblematic of what we really care about at IGLHRC and why all of you are here tonight. As Friedel said, we want LGBT people globally to find and keep jobs, access police free from police brutality, and receive adequate and LGBT-specific healthcare.

To be clear, I am not asking you to turn away from your commitment to our LGBT communities in the US; we need your on-going commitment. But, I am asking you to be a part of the movement to broaden our vistas. We owe it to ourselves and to our community to be a part of a global LGBT movement.

Here's another secret, this time not from my mom but from me.

We can change anything, even entrenched homophobia and transphobia, if you ask the experts what is needed — that is, those who live and work in the community every day -- those like Yasemin Oz, Dorothy Sander, and Dr. Binnaz Toprak, and you help them to have the resources to do what they know best. And that's what we try to do at IGLHRC.

In conclusion, we started tonight by talking about sex, and based on what I witnessed in the cocktail hour, I have a feeling that some of you will end the night doing more than just talking...

We talked about religion (or at least, my prayers for our global movement)...

We talked about money, and we talked about how it is distributed politically...

As we get into the heart of the program, hearing from the honorees themselves, I hope that you'll develop a deeper understanding of why support for LGBT rights movements around the world must be our collective priority, financially and politically, and I hope you have a great time – not being very polite.

Thank you.