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To Mr Graeme Reid

Subject: Urgent Action Required to Address Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Context of Anti-LGBT+ Religious Institutions in South Africa, Impacting the Human Rights to Freedom of Expression, Association, and Assembly.

I pen this submission as an independent activist deeply concerned about the pervasive violence and discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community in South Africa, particularly in the context of anti-LGBT+ sentiments propagated by certain religious institutions and remains unchecked and unchallenged even though South Africa is a constitutionally secular state. It is imperative to address this pressing issue, considering its profound impact on the fundamental human rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Background:

South Africa, a nation celebrated for its historic fight against apartheid and the promotion of human rights, continues to grapple with challenges affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Despite legal advancements, anti-LGBT+ sentiments persist, notably within certain religious institutions. These institutions, wielding significant influence, contribute to an environment where violence and discrimination against individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity thrive.

Violence and Discrimination:

Religious institutions play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes. Regrettably, some institutions in South Africa have been complicit in fostering discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. Such actions not only violate the principles of equality and non-discrimination but also impede the exercise of basic human rights, particularly the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

Freedom of Expression:

The right to freely express one's sexual orientation or gender identity is stifled when religious institutions propagate anti-LGBT+ rhetoric. This creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation,

where individuals may hesitate to openly express their identities due to the risk of social ostracism and even violence. Governments must take proactive measures to counteract hate speech within religious contexts and ensure the protection of the right to freedom of expression for all citizens.

Freedom of Association:

LGBTQ+ individuals often face obstacles in freely associating with like-minded individuals, especially within communities influenced by anti-LGBT+ religious teachings. The right to form and join organizations that support LGBTQ+ rights is crucial for community building and advocacy. Governments must actively protect the right of LGBTQ+ individuals to associate freely, including within religious contexts, without fear of persecution.

Freedom of Assembly:

Peaceful assembly is a powerful tool for advocacy and community mobilization. However, LGBTQ+ individuals face challenges when attempting to assemble peacefully, particularly in areas influenced by anti-LGBT+ religious doctrines. Governments must ensure the safety and protection of LGBTQ+ individuals during public demonstrations and gatherings, safeguarding their right to peacefully assemble.

Addressing Anti-LGBT+ Religious Institutions:

Dialogue and Education:

Encourage constructive dialogue between LGBTQ+ advocates and religious leaders to foster understanding and bridge the gap between faith communities and the LGBTQ+ community. Support educational initiatives that promote tolerance and respect for diversity within religious institutions.

Legal Protections:

Strengthen legal frameworks to address hate speech and discrimination, including within religious contexts. Ensure that legal protections extend to all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and hold institutions accountable for promoting or endorsing discriminatory practices.

Human Rights Training:

Implement human rights training programs for religious leaders to raise awareness about the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals. Foster an environment where religious institutions actively contribute to the promotion of inclusivity and respect for all members of society.

Community Engagement:

Facilitate open discussions within communities, encouraging acceptance and understanding of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Promote the inclusion of LGBTQ+ perspectives in religious discourse, challenging stereotypes and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.

Supportive Policies:

Advocate for policies that explicitly protect the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals within religious institutions. Work towards creating an environment where faith communities actively support and embrace diversity, free from discrimination and violence.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the United Nations Human Rights Council must urgently address the multifaceted challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in South Africa and other secular states, particularly in the context of anti-LGBT+ sentiments propagated by certain religious institutions. The principles of freedom of expression, association, and assembly must be upheld for all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is imperative that the international community collaborates with South African authorities to foster an environment where human rights are respected, and diversity is celebrated.

Sincerely,