

CHENNAI RAINBOW PRIDE COALITION

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MEDIA RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chennai to Host Rainbow Pride March on Sunday June 28, 2009
Press Conference at 11 am on Friday June 26, 2009

PRESS CONFERENCE	CHENNAI RAINBOW PRIDE MARCH
Friday June 26, 2009, 11 a.m. CP Ramaswamy Arts Centre Auditorium 1, Eldams Road, Alwarpet, Chennai 600 018	Sunday June 28, 2009, 4 p.m. Marina Beach Starting at Triumph of Labour Statue Concluding at Mahatma Gandhi Statue

Participants:

Sunil Menon (Sahodaran), Magdalene Jeyaratnam (Center for Counselling) , L Ramakrishnan (SAATHII), Shiva Kumar (Sangama), Kalki (Sahodari Foundation)

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Chennai will host its first Rainbow Pride March on Sunday June 28, 2009 at Marina Beach. The March lends visibility to the voices and struggles of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, and is a commemoration of the Stonewall Riots of June 1969 in New York, USA, that ignited the fight for civil rights by and for LGBT people the world over.

In India, the pride marches first began in Kolkata ten years ago, and in recent years have been conducted in Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru. This year, pride marches will be held for the first time in Chennai and Bhubaneswar. These marches are the combined effort of individuals from the LGBT communities, straight allies, and organizations supportive of the cause. A remarkable feature is that they will include families, friends of the LGBT community, and anyone who believes in human rights.

The theme of Chennai's Rainbow Pride march draws on the immortal words of Tamil Poet Bharathiar , **வண்ணங்கள் வநேற்றமழைப்பட்டால் , அதில் மாணுடர் வநேற்றமழையில் லை:** Hues may vary but humanity does not!

The march will focus on the essential humanity of all, despite differences in sexuality and gender identity. It seeks to dispel the notion that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are suffering from physical or mental illness, aping western culture, or rejecting their own cultural traditions. Rights for LGBT people have been internationally

recognized as inalienable human rights, most recently by the United Nations 2008 declaration on sexual orientation and gender identity, signed by 67 countries.

Kalki from the transgender group Sahodari Foundation, acknowledges that Tamil Nadu is far ahead of the rest of the country when it comes to welfare of transgenders. She says “The Aravani Welfare Board set up by the Tamil Nadu Government addresses needs of a community which has been oppressed and denied its basic rights for centuries. Inclusion of a third gender in co-educational institutions, issuing of ration cards, free sexual reassignment surgery, and Rs. 1 crore allocation for housing, are among the schemes initiated for transgenders, for which the community is profoundly grateful to the TN government and the Chief Minister”

The Chennai Rainbow Coalition, a collective of LGBT individuals, supporters, and organizations working on human rights and health, emphasizes that, despite such local initiatives, there is a dire need at the national level to read down Section 377 of the Indian Penal code, in order to decriminalize sex between consenting adults of the same sex.

“There is a strong need to end harassment and discrimination against LGBT people from families, communities, educational institutions and law enforcement”, says Sunil Menon of Sahodaran, an organization that addresses health and HIV prevention among men who have sex with men.

While transgenders, as the most visible part of the LGBT community, bear the brunt of public violence and discrimination, others such as lesbians, gays, and bisexuals also face such violations of their rights as failure of their families to acknowledge their same sex desire, forced marriage to members of the other sex. “Tamil Nadu and Kerala have seen a spate of suicides by lesbian couples who are unable to deal with family pressures to separate or to marry men instead. This must stop” said Aniruddhan Vasudevan of the Shakti Center, a Chennai-based NGO.

”Internationally recognized medical manuals such as the ‘Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders’ and the World Health Organisation’s International Classification of Diseases state clearly that homosexuality is not a mental illness” said Dr. L.Ramakrishnan of the NGO SAATHII. Despite these, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in India are routinely sent by their parents to psychiatrists who attempt to ‘rid’ them of their same-sex desire using electro-shock therapy, drugs, and other means. The March will appeal to parents and healthcare providers alike to stop such atrocities.

Another issue that will be highlighted at the March is that of forced HIV testing of transgenders and men who have sex with men, according to Shiva of Sangama, a human rights NGO that is coordinating the Chennai Rainbow Pride March. “We demand that HIV testing follow the national government protocols of pre-test counseling, post-test counseling, and respect the confidentiality of clients”, said Shiva.

For more information on Chennai Rainbow Pride March and other events, see <http://chennaipride.orinam.net>