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ARC Co-Directors John Fisher & Kim Vance

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## ARC UPDATE

### *“Towards a Strategic International LGBT Human Rights Agenda”*

*- January 2004*

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#### Introduction

In a world where the human rights of LGBT persons are abused on a daily basis, with limited commitment by many countries or UN bodies to develop or implement international standards to address these recurring human rights abuses, systematic planning to build community infrastructure, networks and strategic responses is urgently needed.

ARC International seeks to advance recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (“LGBT”) human rights at the international level, by building networks and infrastructure and integrating sexual orientation and gender identity issues into international human rights machinery and discourse.

#### Overview

ARC works to develop linkages between LGBT rights organizations, women’s and sexual and reproductive rights organizations, youth groups, progressive religious and faith-based organizations, labour groups, human rights organizations and others. Building upon these linkages, we are developing and maintaining an international network on sexual orientation and gender identity issues, building capacity in underrepresented regions, and coordinating with other human rights groups to maximize support for the advancement of sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual and reproductive rights at the UN Commission on Human Rights. We are also working to develop a strategic vision and action plan for advancing the human rights of LGBT people at the international level.



Participants in a consultation co-hosted by ARC in Brazil, December 2003

“I used to think being gay was just part of my life and now I know it means dark cells and beatings. It is very, very difficult to be gay in Egypt.

I’ll tell you something. Some things that happen in your life you can forget. And there are some things that you can never forget, even for one minute. You forget the good times; you may have been happy in a moment and you forget. But the black days you can’t forget. If it’s inside you, you remember every minute. And [the day I was tortured] was a very black day in my life. ... It hurts me to remember.

I don’t sleep at all. If I sleep I would dream about the trial. If I have to go back to prison, I will kill myself. What do they want from us? I have no one to talk to, no one to ask. No one who can understand. What do they want from us? Why do they want our lives?”

- Ziyad, Human Rights Watch, *In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt’s Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct*, 2004

#### Activities to Date

After speaking at a conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Muslims, we contributed to a report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, responding to claims by the anti-gay groups R.E.A.L. Women and Focus on the Family that homosexuality is inherently

harmful to children. These extremist anti-feminist and anti-LGBT organizations have begun to participate in UN processes in a systematic, organized way, questioning basic human rights assumptions and challenging even minimal gains.

We also participated in meetings with Dr. Paul Hunt, who is the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, about the negative health impact of homophobia - as a result of gay-bashings, low self-esteem, denial of access to information about healthy sexualities and increased suicide rates for LGBT youth.

In November, ARC Co-Directors Kim Vance and John Fisher participated in the ILGA World Conference in the Philippines, where they presented workshops on *Strategizing for the UN Commission on Human Rights*, and *Advancing Equal Marriage Internationally*, as well as a workshop by Kim on *Women in International Organizing*.

In December, ARC co-hosted, together with the sexual and reproductive rights organization ACPD, a major initiative – a consultation in Brazil which brought together activists from countries around the world to develop strategies for advancing sexual orientation at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The Brazilian resolution on sexual orientation seeks to affirm – for the first time ever – the human rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people at the UN level, a recognition that is desperately needed.

### Outcomes and Next Steps

Although a great deal has been accomplished in a very short time, it is also apparent that much remains to be done in responding to the international needs that have been identified. In 2004-2005, we will continue the process of developing our international network, we will develop much-needed resource materials to facilitate broad NGO participation in the Commission on Human Rights, we will develop our Website to make this information as accessible as possible, and we will host a consultation to ensure effective participation by activists from all regions in the development and implementation of international strategies for advancing LGBT rights.

Some comments and feedback received on ARC's work to date include:

- “This is great and timely organizing on an issue many would not openly identify with. It is rare to find a forum like this that successfully weaves substantive issues & strategies & action together.”
- “The consultation definitely went beyond my expectations. It gave me both knowledge and inspiration to participate in the strategy.”
- “I feel I am not alone.”
- “Thanks again for the enormously important work you have been doing to keep our efforts progressing. Especially to John and Kim for facilitating this, and to everybody for their valuable comments!”
- “New ideas, new opportunities, good ideas and contacts to follow up. This meeting has proved very motivating. More successful than I would have thought possible. You’ve done a great thing.”