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The Dignity Initiative - Charter

***A pilot platform for organizations and individuals interested in
Canada's role in supporting the human rights of LGBTI people
globally.***

REVISED - May 2017



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Table of Contents

Proposed Model for a Pilot	3
Rationale	3
Core Principles	4
Accountability Structure	5
Membership	5
Advisory Group	6
Core Working Group.....	6
Sub-Groups	6
External Relationships & Communications	6
Administration, Coordination and Funding.....	7
Process and Next Steps.....	7
Appendix B: Feedback from Dignity Initiative Roundtable Participants	9



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Proposed Model for a Pilot

Rationale

Currently, there is no active national mechanism for civil society organizations in Canada interested in international LGBTI issues or refugee issues to communicate with each other, develop joint advocacy projects, share ideas and stories, or convene regularly. Over the past decade the number of NGOs in this space has increased significantly, with international development NGOs, LGBTI and HIV/AIDS human rights organizations, religious organizations, unions, educational & research institutions or cultural organizations such as Prides, increasingly developing projects and doing work related to global LGBTI issues. A number of Canadian NGOs, such as Oxfam Canada and Equitas International Centre for Human Rights Education, have applied for and accessed funding from other countries such as The Netherlands and the EU for support of their global LGBTI programming. Several other countries have also developed civil society networks, such as the Council for Global Equality in the US, with a goal of encouraging their countries' foreign policies in this area.

Canadian foreign policy began to more visibly support the human rights of LGBTI people globally in 2013 and 2014, with, for example, small pots of funding being made available to over 40 LGBTI organizations in at least 30 countries. More and more Canadian Embassies and High Commissions are making connections to and supporting local LGBTI human rights groups in their countries. 2015 saw the election of a new government in Canada with a stronger mandate for support of human rights for LGBTI people. The mandate letters for several ministers spoke about the importance of human rights especially for minorities. Since the election, there have been steps towards inclusion of sexual diversity and gender identity in foreign policy including the establishment of the Office of Freedom, Human Rights, and Inclusion within Global Affairs Canada in May 2016 and Canada becoming one of the 30 original signatory countries of the new Equality Rights Coalition of countries in July 2016 at a conference in Montevideo, Uruguay. The time is right for an ongoing civil society network of people and organizations across Canada supportive of LGBTI human rights issues globally. The network will be set up on a pilot basis and it will be evaluated at that time based on success related to its goals set by the membership. The network's proposed name is *The Dignity Initiative: A Canadian Network for Global LGBTI Human Rights*.



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Purpose and Role

The purpose of the Dignity Initiative will be to provide a platform for Canadian based-organizations and individuals and their global partners to support the human rights of LGBTI people globally, including issues related to LGBTI refugees.

Our primary role will be to:

- Act as a hub for communication and knowledge-sharing, especially emphasizing the perspectives of international partners
- Convene and host gatherings, conferences and meetings

Our secondary role – pending resources and piloting – will be to:

- Encourage and support research related to global LGBTI human rights
- Engage and support advocacy efforts both nationally and internationally, including the Canadian government

Core Principles

The following draft principles for the work of the Dignity Initiative pilot project are proposed:

- Pan-Canadian – we will try to connect with groups and individuals in all provinces and territories.
- International Solidarity – we will strive to centre the voices and perspectives of people with lived experience on international LGBTI human rights and refugee issues.
- Bilingualism – we will strive to function in both official languages, French and English.
- Transparency – all relevant materials and information created will be shared online where possible. The network will make public its operations, decision-making structures and strive to ensure open communication with its members.



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- Collaboration – we will support inter-organizational sharing and learning. Opportunities for collaboration will be explored where there are areas of shared interest.
- Diversity – we will strive to reach out and include a diverse range of organizations and individuals with an interest in Canada’s role in international LGBTI issues, both across Canada and outside of Canada. We strive to centre the voices of people most impacted by foreign policy and refugee policy.
- Intersectionality – we recognize that LGBTI human rights are intrinsically connected to issues of other issues of social justice including class, economic justice, ability, sexism, racism and restrictions on sexual and reproductive health rights. We will consequently work across these overlapping areas of marginalization and injustice.
- Anti-Colonialism – we recognize that much of the current context around the rights and dignity of LGBTI people globally and nationally has been shaped by colonialism. We acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and will strive to support the work of indigenous and two-spirit activists and organizations in these struggles.

Accountability Structure

Membership

The Dignity Initiative will be open to individuals and organizations with an interest in Canada’s role supporting the human rights of LGBTI people globally. Members will be asked to make a suggested donation upon joining the Dignity Initiative but this is not required. All members will be required to sign onto the Dignity Initiative’s Call to Action and our network principles.

Members will receive:

- Regular communications (such as a listserv or newsletter)
- Invitations to participate in convenings and conferences
- Opportunity to join the working group or one of the sub-groups
- Opportunity to provide input and help shape the network’s goals



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Advisory Group

An international advisory group will be set up to provide advice and leadership to the network. The Advisory will consist of volunteers with a range of experiences related to international human rights and refugee issues. It will have between 12 and 16 people and include people from across Canada as well as people outside Canada who have a connection to Canada, such as an organizational partnership. We will strive to have global regional representation. The Advisory will have a meeting or conference call twice a year.

The Advisory will reflect a range of diversities including gender identity and national and regional diversity. There is an expectation that the advisory group will support the core working group and sub-groups in setting priorities and developing new initiatives.

Core Working Group

A core working group will be set up to manage the regular business of the network. The working group will consist of 5 to 7 volunteers. Each member will be responsible for managing a particular aspect of the work of the Dignity Initiative, such as convening, communications or leading a particular sub-group (see below.) The working group will have monthly conference calls.

The Core Working Group will participate in and help shape the agenda for the bi-annual Advisory call.

Sub-Groups

A number of sub-groups will be set up as determined by interest of members. At the initial roundtable in June 2016, there were three particularly popular issues that attendees were interested in working on: 1) international assistance funding and partnerships, 2) combatting the export of religious homophobia, and 3) supporting LGBTI refugees to Canada. Other topics or areas of interest, such as research, advocacy, convening, communications could have their own sub-groups. Sub-groups can develop their own goals and working agendas.

Terms of Reference for the Advisory Group and Core Working Group will be developed that outline these structural elements and decision-making processes.

External Relationships & Communications

The Dignity Initiative will establish relationships with other similar networks outside of Canada to share best practices, ideas and foster communication. The Dignity Initiative



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will also maintain contact with staff at the federal government with responsibility for files related to international LGBTI human rights issues and LGBTI refugee issues.

Administration, Coordination and Funding

The Dignity Initiative will be an unincorporated network platform that will rest within a secretariat host organization. The host organization will be the legal entity ultimately responsible for legal oversight of the network. The work of the Dignity Initiative will be done by volunteers and contractors if funding is accessed.

If the Dignity Initiative is able to access funds for its work, this will be administered by the host secretariat organization with direction from the Working Group. The Dignity Initiative will try and access funds in order to hire contractors responsible for coordination and communication functions. Budget lines will include funds for translation costs.

Process and Next Steps

This document along with an online feedback survey was sent to all of the civil society representatives who attended the Dignity Initiative roundtable in June. Responses were received from 24 organizations and feedback integrated into this document – all organizations expressed interest in joining Dignity Initiative. On May 12, 18 people from across Canada participate in a call to discuss this document, make revisions and confirm the next steps.

Once an Advisory Group and Core Working Group are established, an invitation to participate in Dignity Initiative will go out to the 130 organizations that signed onto the DI Call to Action submitted to the federal government in February 2016.

The next in-person gathering for Dignity Initiative will be at the Canada Pride Human Rights Conference in Montreal, August 14-17, 2017. We are planning a pre-conference on Monday, August 14. The Dignity Initiative will be launched publicly at this conference.



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Appendix A: Dignity Initiative – History and Work to Date

The Dignity Initiative emerged in 2015 from a working group of Canadian civil society organizations and individuals interested in supporting the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) communities around the world. Created by a number of participants attending the 2014 WorldPride Human Rights Conference, the initiative aimed to fill a gap in pan-Canadian organizing and advocacy on international issues related to LGBTI communities.

Over the past 18 months the project has:

- Developed a comprehensive Call to Action outlining how Canada can defend the human rights of LGBTI people around the world. This Call to Action was endorsed by 130 organizations and submitted to the new federal government in February, 2016. The Call to Action was based on an open letter written to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in March 2014 led by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and #EndHateLaws.
- Conducted research regarding best practices on how national governments and Canadian civil society can most effectively protect the human rights of LGBTI people around the world. Two reports were written and released in summer 2016: 1) [Solidarity for Dignity: Insights for Canadian Organizations Working Globally to Support the Human Rights of LGBTI People](#), and 2) [Advancing Dignity: Assessing Canada's Global Action on Human Rights for LGBTI People](#).
- Hosted the first ever national Canadian roundtable on how Canadians and the Canadian government can support the human rights of LGBTI people globally. This national roundtable was held June 1-2, 2016 and involved over 50 representatives from 25 civil society organizations. The event also included a half-day of presentations by Canadian government officials, a reception on Parliament Hill with dozens of elected representatives and their staff and the raising of the Rainbow Flag on Parliament Hill.



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Appendix B: Feedback from Dignity Initiative Roundtable Participants

After the national roundtable meetings in June 2016, all participants received an evaluation survey about the event with questions around interest in future collaboration and coordination. In response to a question about whether or not the Dignity Initiative should continue to exist, respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of some form of continued iteration of this initiative, with **94.3% of respondents indicating “yes” and 5.7% indicating that they were unsure, and 0 respondents saying “no”.**

Attendees also provided a range of ideas around what they hoped would follow for the Dignity Initiative. Below is a summary of some of the main themes to emerge in participants’ survey responses:

- Need/potential for sustained collaboration: overwhelmingly attendees indicated interest in working together to support Canadian engagement on global LGBTI human rights issues. Considerable enthusiasm was expressed for maintaining, strengthening, and utilizing the networks developed before and during the roundtable.
- Continued networking: Pride Montreal - Canada Pride 2017 will be hosting a major national LGBTI human rights conference in August 2017. Dignity Initiative has been invited to help formulate the conference component on Canada and LGBTI issues globally and LGBTI refugees and this will be an important venue to follow-up on the Dignity Initiative's Call to Action and 22 recommendations to the Government of Canada.
- Striving to apply an intersectional approach in collaboration within civil society and institutions: ensuring that LGBTI concerns are analyzed alongside issues of gender, race, religion, and other forms of marginalization.
- The need to advocate for funding, particularly from the Canadian government. Most of civil society's current work on these issues does not receive funding from the Canadian government. The network indicated the need to come together to review discussions and explore structural models for collaboration and/or communication. Most Canadian LGBTI solidarity work is done through



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funding from European governments or through volunteer efforts. (It is important to note that since the roundtable meetings in June, the Dignity Initiative participated in Global Affairs Canada's International Assistance Review. Please see [Supporting Dignity: The Role of LGBTI Rights and Sexual Rights in Canada's International Assistance](#) for our report submitted to Global Affairs Canada on July 30.)

- Developing a space to connect practitioners to academic and community-based research and to share best practices around ways to support international solidarity related to LGBTI human rights.

Attendees were asked which of the open space groups they would be willing to continue work on if the Dignity Initiative were to continue as a network. The following numbers indicated the number of attendees interested in participating in potential network working groups:

1. Increasing funding for LGBTI work within Canada's international development assistance: 20
2. Supporting LGBTI refugees: 19
3. Bringing Canadian foreign policy and refugee issues into Fierté Canada Pride's Human Rights Conference in 2017: 17
4. Research on LGBTI human rights globally: 14
5. Confronting religious-based homophobia in Canada and abroad: 10
6. Solidarity with Ukrainian LGBTI activists: 6
7. Using video to tell stories related to LGBTI people globally: 5

Other working group topics suggested: 1) Solidarity development with activists in the global south and 2) Coordinating national advocacy towards the federal government on topics related to international LGBTI issues and refugee issues.

Following the national roundtable, a small group of representatives of various groups who had attended the meetings came together for a follow-up conference call on next steps and a possible network model. This group decided to develop a proposal for a pilot project to test the idea of a national network related to global LGBTI human rights work. This document brings together some of their ideas as well as other suggestions from other potential partners such as the Council for Global Equality in the United States.