



## **SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY**

*A Resolution of Witness*

Submitted by Wider Church Ministries

(Adopted by the 28<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ, Tampa, FL, July 1-5, 2011)

### **SUMMARY**

This resolution seeks to raise awareness of international instances of systematic discrimination, violence and abuse targeting persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI), and of contexts where such abuse is not prohibited by law but rather legally, politically, socially, and even religiously sanctioned. The resolution would commit the UCC to advocate for the fair and equal application of universal human rights principles and laws toward the protection of all persons from sexual or gender status-based abuse, discrimination or criminal prosecution.

### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

The foundation of human rights derives from the creation narratives of scripture in which human beings are created by God in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' public ministry begins with the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus teaches his disciples to hunger and thirst for justice, to be merciful, to be peacemakers, and to accept persecution for the sake of justice (Matt. 5: 6, 7, 9, 10); in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus calls on his disciples to follow the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." And, Jesus' exhorts his disciples to address the needs of the "least" that are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison (Matthew 25:34-40). The Church acts faithfully when it regards all humans as equal in worth and dignity and when it seeks the just treatment of all in societies and by laws and public authorities.

### **RESOLUTION**

#### **WHEREAS:**

The Tenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ (1975) declared, "In faithfulness to the biblical and historic mandate, we hold that, as a child of God, every person is endowed with worth and dignity that human judgment cannot set aside." (A Pronouncement: Civil Liberties without Discrimination Related to Affectional or Sexual Preference), and previous General Synod and Executive Council actions have declared faithful support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (GS2, 1959) and committed to church to seek the full application of international human rights (GS12, 1979); and

International human rights standards delineate the positive obligations a nation must fulfill in order for its residents to live fully human lives. Collectively, these liberties and obligations define the "common good" and implicate government to be proactive in the establishment and maintenance of that good; and

International human rights standards can provide common language to describe universal concerns, including promises and claims to justice that transcend any one nation; common vision around which

disparate and affected groups can gather and build coalitions to create change; and common measurements that all can use to hold public officials, policymakers, agencies and organizations accountable; and

In order for universal human rights standards to be truly universal, every person, whatever their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, is entitled to the full enjoyment of all human rights; and

The use of criminal law, or proposals to use criminal law, against members of sexual minorities creates a legal and social environment that is discriminatory and violates the human rights endorsed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is evident in the many cases of harassment, arrest and prosecution of persons based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, and in the inflammatory statements issued by national and local leaders (including religious and other civil society leaders) which vilify sexual minorities and gender non-conforming people and, in extreme cases, call for violence against them; and

Around the world, such discrimination, violence and abuse targeting persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity often goes unreported, uninvestigated and unpunished; and

Around the world, such discrimination, violence and abuse targeting persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity seriously undermines attempts to provide effective HIV prevention, treatment, care and support; and

In many countries, the work of human rights defenders is opposed, obstructed or banned; and where the right to peacefully gather is denied and actions are taken to silence the voices of human rights supporters; and

The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) urgently supports countries towards the adoption and implementation of laws and law enforcement that protect sexual minorities from discrimination, harassment, violence, and arrest and prosecution on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity;

The United States continues to address how best legally and socially to protect the human rights of everyone in our own country;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Twenty-eighth General Synod of the United Church of 86 Christ:

Reaffirms the 10th General Synod of the United Church of Christ (1975), “A Pronouncement: Civil Liberties without Discrimination Related to Affectional or Sexual Preference,” and previous General Synod and Executive Council actions in support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (GS2, 1959) and of denominational advocacy toward the full application of international human rights (GS12, 1979); and

In faithfulness to the biblical and historic mandate, holds that, as a child of God, every person is endowed by God with worth and dignity that human judgment cannot set aside; and

Deplores the use of scripture to generate hatred and the violation of human rights, including human rights violations in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression; and

Declares its support for the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI); and

Calls upon the leadership of faith communities to foster discussion and a deeper understanding of the foundations of human rights, so that our churches and the wider community may better understand the source beliefs that undergird fair and just practices for all, including SOGI communities; and

Calls upon the individual members of our churches, lay leaders, clergy, local churches, institution, agencies, and the various geographical and other expressions of the church to advocate for policies and legislation consistent with the Yogyakarta Principles at the United Nations, and at the federal, state and local levels of government of the United States; and

Calls upon the leadership of local churches, geographical expressions of the church, and program ministers in the national settings to identify and distribute materials that describe universal human rights as they have been defined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; and

Calls upon the leadership of local churches, geographical expressions of the church, and program ministers in the national settings, to maintain a constant awareness of violations of human rights in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, through the use of reporting and a wide range of communication outlets, and encourages our affiliated, ecumenical and interfaith partners to do the same; and

Calls upon the national ministries of the United Church of Christ to work collaboratively with Common Global Ministries to identify partners with which to cooperate for the effective implementation of this resolution in ways that are respectful of cultural sensitivities; and Directs that Justice & Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Wider Church Ministries, and the Office of General Ministries will be responsible for developing the strategies, programs, and resources to implement the Resolution.

#### FUNDING

Funding for the implementation of this Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

The Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ are requested to implement this resolution.