



#differenceisnotacrime

#الاختلاف_ليس_جريمة

**To whom it may concern,
Arabic speaking international and regional audiovisual media
In Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt
5/3/2021**

We hope this letter finds you well and healthy,
Greetings,

We are writing to you on behalf of the following organizations ``**Haven for Artists, Mawjoudin, Helem, AFE and Atyaf**'' to inform you of the results of our research on a range of violations that LGBTQI+ people face on daily basis in Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, and the MENA region in general, and to acquire some information aiming to build a cooperation between media institutions and our organisations regarding the practices of the media against LGBTQI+ individuals in each of the aforementioned countries. LGBTQI+ is a term used to describe a non normative sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression and/or sex characteristics .

In April, each of the institutions involved in this letter published a campaign based on a research around the discrimination and violence that LGBTQI+ people are subjected to when hosted on media outlets in Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia. This campaign is a response to different episodes and interviews that were broadcast on your channels, which included members of the LGBTQI+ community.

The organizations participating in the campaign found an increase in the rates of violence and unethical treatment against members of the LGBTQI+ community at the hands of the presenters and hosts of the media programs that are broadcasted through your channels. This included hate speech, violence, spreading misinformation about LGBTQI+ people and issues, spreading hate speech, accessing private information that individuals do not want to share within the program, misgendering , disrespecting the way they express themselves,

pathologizing them in front of the public, judging their lives in the name of religion, customs and traditions, in addition to belittling them and stripping them of their humanity.

During our analysis of interviews and broadcasts, we found that LGBTQI+ people are more deterred from seeking accountability or redress for the violations they face due to a combination of many social issues such as social marginalization, prejudice, the inefficacy of both ethical codes and documented protocols meant to monitor and report abuse by media outlets and the presenters/hosts.

Most of the episodes that included members of the LGBTQI+ community were broadcasted with the aim of gaining viewership. In the Egyptian media, they are completely neglecting the actual issues and challenges that the queer community faces and suffers from, whether it is in terms of social, legal and/or health issues. Most of the time, when media professionals host LGBTQI+ people on their platform, it includes a lot of insulting and belittling behaviour towards the guest in question, and the culture of forced outing is perpetuated. Moreover, they always choose to show individuals who carry non normative gender identities as victims and vulnerable members of society, in hopes of highlighting the problems and challenges that this community faces, when in fact they are perpetuating the complete opposite. They only end up contributing to the consolidation of the stereotypes that this community suffers from, completely forgetting the basic needs that LGBTQI+ people seek to achieve, which is access to justice and equality.

The contribution of the organisations concerned with this campaign is to create an opportunity for media professionals to provide and to include information and new perspectives that could contribute to improving the media content when hosting members of the LGBTQI+ community . We will endeavour to include any relevant information that you send to us in our campaign, if we receive it by May 20th, 2021, so that our campaign is as complete as possible. We would be grateful for your response to the following questions:

1- We will recommend, in our next campaign, that the local media recommend that the program's presenters and presenters stop violating the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation or / and gender identity, including violating the privacy of the hosts, and publishing inaccurate information about LGBTQI+ issues.

2- We recommend that the media platforms issue clear protocols and instructions to the hosts and program presenters with the purpose of strengthening the ethical principles when dealing with LGBTQI+ issues in order to reach effective and constructive coverage of the issues that the community seeks to achieve. Will the media adhere to this recommendation?

3- We recommend against publishing the false and stereotyped images that this community suffers from, by limiting the hosting persons to judge the lives of LGBTQI+ people and the backgrounds from which they come from.

a- How will the media platforms ensure that program presenters respect the rights and identities of LGBTQI+ people when hosting them, and refrain from harassing them on the basis of their gender identity or the way they express the latter?

4- We know that the media respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates the right to life, liberty and security of the individual without any discrimination, and that the media have a complaint mechanism through which individuals who have been harassed or mistreated by program providers can report violations:

a- Please provide us with details of the mechanisms currently in place to hold program presenters accountable for the violations they commit against LGBTQI+ people.

b- In the past five years, have any of the media program hosts been held accountable for the transgressions against LGBTQI+ individuals? If so, what is the number, what are the violations, and what are the penalties?

c- What are the concrete steps taken by the media to ensure that the hosts on media programs, including the LGBTQI+ community, are aware of the current complaint mechanisms, that the complaint is handled confidentially and quickly, following a clear procedure, and that the hosts can file a complaint without the fear of offense?

5- We recommend that the media issue clear guidelines regarding the treatment of LGBTQI+ people, with appropriate penalties for failure to follow the ethical guidelines. Will the media adhere to these recommendations? If so, please provide us with the timeframe for this action and the concrete steps you will take to implement it.

We look forward to your answers to these questions, and any additional comments you would like to provide regarding LGBTQI+ people receiving ethical media coverage in Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to collaborate and discuss our findings.

Thank you in advance for looking into our open letter . If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

With great appreciation and respect
Haven for Artists, Mawjoudin, Atyaf, Helem, AFE

A brief introduction to the participating organizations:

Haven for Artists:

Haven for Artists is an all-inclusive queer feminist arts organization (NGO) based in Beirut, Lebanon, working at the intersection of art and activism. Haven combines creative and humanitarian methods to facilitate a safe space for the exchange of knowledge, tools, and skills in-order to create a more just world.

HFA believes that art is uniquely able to explain complex sociocultural issues in an accessible way to a diverse audience in a non-confrontational manner. To this end, HFA connects talented artists from the Middle East with advocacy groups, activists, and NGOs striving to further human rights, particularly concerning LBTQI persons and women.

We host/produce:

- Regular visual exhibitions
- Festivals, concerts & cultural events
- Roundtables, workshops & creative forums
- Advocacy and humanitarian campaigns

MAWJOUNDIN:

MAWJOUNDIN is an officially registered not-for-profit NGO that is based in Tunisia, and works towards achieving equality, human rights, bodily rights and sexual rights for the LGBTQI+ community and other marginalized groups and individuals through advocacy, documentation, capacity building, awareness-raising, safe spaces and lobbying.

Our approach is inclusive, as we adopt a decentralized approach in our work, to include people coming from different backgrounds, age groups, genders, sexual orientations and different cities and remote areas across Tunisia. Our main aim is to promote diversity and non-discrimination to combat oppression. We are dedicated to defending the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals so that they can live openly in a culture that respects and values their dignity. Our vision is to spread human rights culture to be able to live in a society where discrimination on the basis of SOGIESC* do not exist, and to be able to live in a society that promotes integrity, dignity, celebrates difference and where love , identity and expression are not crimes.

*Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity ; Expression and Sex Characteristics

Helem:

Helem (or “dream” in Arabic) is the first LGBTQIA+ rights organization in the Arab world, officially established in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2004. Our mission is to lead a peaceful struggle for the liberation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, transgender, queer, and other persons with non-conforming sexualities and/or gender identities (LGBTQIA+) in Lebanon and the MENA region from all sorts of violations of their individual and collective civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Helem is currently running multiple advocacy programs and campaigns, in addition to providing services to members of the LGBTQIA+ community – mainly in Lebanon – such as case management, emergency response, legal support, mental health assistance, and more. Furthermore, we maintain a community center space open to all members, volunteers, and visitors. The community center serves not only as a safe space in which monthly activities and events are hosted but also as a hub for queer activists who share and want to be part of Helem’s fight and vision.

We are fueled by our mission to empower LGBTQIA+ leaders from every walk of life to pioneer and spearhead their gender and sexual liberations. We utilize a grassroots and community-based approach that leverages diversity as a strength, not a weakness.

Atyaf:

A queer, regional Arabic speaking media group, founded in July 2017, we believe in intersectionality, and change through different media platforms. We also believe in the importance of building a queer media discourse generating from the local/regional context, on which individuals from different groups of the queer community and non-conforming gender work on. We also believe in the importance

of advocacy in order to stop the various media rhetoric that opposes people and issues of sexual orientations, sexual characteristics and gender identities, that incite hatred and charging that leads to violence and to entrench rejection and misinformation.

AFE:

The Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE) is an officially registered non-governmental organization based in Beirut, Lebanon. AFE focuses its efforts exclusively on Arab states across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). AFE supports grassroots activist groups and organizations (Regional Partners) that are working on a wide range of initiatives including human rights , gender and sexual and sexual health. AFE provides a comprehensive package of opportunities for Regional Partners.

Our vision is to have a civil society that is strong, independent of political and financial pressures, free to conduct its work on equality, freedoms, and human rights in a safe environment. Building a society with a strong sense of citizenship and belonging that does not discriminate in its fight for its people's rights, for change, and not afraid to make the changes.

AFE's mission is to encourage and support body, gender and sexual rights activists in the Middle East and North Africa in their work by building their capacities, funding the activists to organize and providing emergency support to activists when needed.

