



CONGRESSIONAL  
LGBT EQUALITY CAUCUS

**COUNTRY UPDATE: LEBANON**

March 18, 2014

Dear Friend:

As Co-Chair of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus and a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and because we share an interest in human rights around the world, I write to update you on the challenges faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in other countries.

As you know, across the world members of the **LGBT community face some of the most horrific human rights violation being reported today**. Over seventy countries and territories criminalize same-sex activity, with varied punishments including imprisonment, forced labor, forced psychiatric treatment, corporal punishment, banishment, and the death penalty. LGBT individuals around the world face homelessness, harassment, persecution, exclusion from society, lack of access to medical care, and a variety of other challenges, simply for being who they are. Despite these continued difficulties, in many countries LGBT communities are celebrating their first Pride events and governments are improving laws regarding the equal rights of LGBT people. I hope you will join me in supporting the fight for full equality around the world.

Lebanon, a country of five million people in the Eastern Mediterranean with a rich history of cultural and religious diversity, has been in the news recently due to controversy over Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which prohibits sexual relations that “contradict the laws of nature” and has previously been used to persecute gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Although Article 534 is not consistently enforced, its continued presence provides an avenue for officials in Lebanon to target the LGBT community.

- For example, recently Mayor of Dekwaneh Antoine Chakhtoura ordered Ghost, a nightclub that caters to LGBT people, to be shutdown. Four individuals were detained during a raid on the club and were subjected to humiliating treatment by police to, as the mayor said, determine their sex. Chakhtoura stated in an interview that he closed the nightclub for the promotion of “prostitution, drugs and homosexuality.”
- The legal basis of the law, however, has been called into question over the past few years. Just last month, for instance, a court in Lebanon made a ruling that same-sex sexual relations could not be considered a crime.
- The Lebanese state had brought a case against a transgender woman, and Judge Naji El Dahdah threw the case out. Although the court failed to appropriately recognize the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, the finding that consensual same-sex relations should not be a crime in Lebanon is a positive development.

Below you will find an in-depth fact-sheet on LGBT individuals in Lebanon that I hope will be useful.

Sincerely,

David N. Cicilline  
*Member of Congress*



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LGBT EQUALITY CAUCUS

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**LEGAL STATUS**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Lebanon face legal challenges and discrimination not experienced by the general population. Same-sex sexual activity is currently illegal in Lebanon under Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code; however this law is infrequently applied, and very rarely applied for same-sex activity between women. This law was challenged in 2009 by LGBT rights group Helem, and a Lebanese judge ruled against the use of this article to prosecute homosexuals. The law was again challenged in January of 2014, when a judge in Beirut threw out a case against a transgender woman and declared that consensual same-sex sexual relations could not be considered a crime. This is a tremendous step toward respecting the fundamental freedoms of all Lebanese, and is among the first decisions of its kind in the Middle East.

**PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

Despite this recent decision, societal acceptance of sexual minorities remains relatively low. A 2013 survey from the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that only 18% of Lebanese agreed that homosexuality should be accepted by society, while 80% said that it should not be accepted. These statistics are unchanged from the Pew survey from 2007. Despite the lack of acceptance by the general population, there are signs of improvement for the LGBT community in Lebanon. On July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Lebanese Psychiatric Society (LPS) released a statement declaring that homosexuality is not an illness, and does not need treatment. LPS further ruled that conversion therapy was unscientific, and recommended that health professionals rely on science when giving opinion on the matter.

**STATE DEPARTMENT HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**

According to the Department of State's Human Rights Report, official and societal discrimination against LGBT persons persisted through 2013. Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code prohibits "unnatural sexual intercourse", an offense punishable by up to one year in prison, however the Lebanese NGO Helem reported fewer than 10 prosecutions under Article 534 during that year. Helem, along with Meem, an NGO for non-heterosexual women, hosted regular meetings and carried out advocacy projects for the LGBT community without interference. The Lebanese government does not collect information about harassment or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity; however NGOs such as Helem and Meem have indicated that LGBT victims of violence and abuse in Lebanon are hesitant to report these incidences due to social stigma attached to sexual minorities.