

LGBTI Activists meet with the Vatican for the First Time in History for Conversations on Decriminalization of Homosexuality

- [Egale](#) is Canada's national LGBTQI2S organization -
- LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex -

April 5, 2019 (Toronto, Canada) – Canadian LGBTI activist, **Helen Kennedy**, who is the former Co-Secretary General of [ILGA](#), and current Executive Director at [Egale Canada](#) – Canada's national LGBTI organization, is one of few LGBTI activists at the **Vatican** today for a meeting with **Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, Vatican Secretary of State, who filled in last minute for **Pope Francis**. At the meeting they discussed the criminalization, discrimination, and violence facing LGBTI people around the world. This is a topic that has been very much on the minds of Canadians from coast to coast to coast with the **50th anniversary of decriminalization of homophobia** happening this summer nationwide.

"It's an honour to be a part of this historic moment," said **Helen Kennedy**, Executive Director at Egale Canada. *"So many LGBTI people continue to face violence and persecution largely because of religion, while others have long struggled to bridge the intersecting identities of faith and sexual orientation or gender identity – it's time for the Church to acknowledge that and begin to take action."*

The LGBTI activists who attended the meeting today urged the Church to take a leadership role in speaking out against criminalization. **The group collectively called on Pope Francis to release a statement condemning the criminal laws that persecute LGBTI people around the world, noting that criminalization leads to persecution.**

"We are disappointed that Pope Francis withdrew last minute from the meeting – the Church has a responsibility to take a leadership role in advocating for the rights of LGBTI people," said **Helen Kennedy** along with other **LGBTI activists** who attended the meeting.

Cardinal Parolin publicly acknowledged the meeting and that there is an opportunity to work together to create positive change. He assured the attendees that the Vatican would respond to the report that was submitted in relation to decriminalization of homosexuality. During the meeting, Parolin also expressed to the LGBTI activists that the Church has a strong belief in human dignity and that it condemns all kinds of violence.

Egale has played a significant role in **Canada** to bridge the gaps between faith and sexual orientation and gender identity. Earlier this year, [Egale Canada](#) held a symposium following the World Parliament of Religions Conference. The symposium brought together various faith leaders from around the world with Catholic school educators to confront religious-based homophobia and discuss the intersections of faith and identity. It also hosted a faith stream at its national conference where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was presented with the Egale Leadership Award.

*“Religion, and specifically the Church, has caused distrust and trauma within the LGBTI community,” said **Kennedy**. “Moments like this hold immense value for so many in the LGBTI community when it comes to healing and finding a way to move forward, but action must always follow.”*

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[Egale](#) works to improve the lives of LGBTQI2S people in Canada and to enhance the global response to LGBTQI2S issues. Egale achieves this by informing policy, inspiring cultural change and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education and community engagement. Egale's vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and all other forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

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