

Rainbow Sangha network

EBU AGM : Report 2017-2018

1. General remarks: aims and mandate

1.1. Aims of the network:

The aim of Rainbow Sangha is to **address the concerns of the Buddhist LGBTI community in Europe** and provide news and information about Buddhism and LGBTI to interested people. It wants, among others, to learn and inform about sexual diversity and the dharma/dhamma: from Buddha Shakyamuni, over various teachers and traditions from the many Buddhist schools from the past till now.

The Rainbow Sangha network aims to:

- I. **connect** existing LGBTI groups along all traditions,
- II. **represent** the European Buddhist LGBTI community,
- III. **share** events and information (articles, videos, ...),
- IV. **write** reports and articles,
- V. **support** social action and ideas motivated by Buddhist inspired values, such as non-discrimination

1.2. Mandate for the network in the EBU Mission and Vision :

The network is in line with the **EBU mission statement**:

“Our mission is to facilitate international exchange and promote spiritual friendship amongst European Buddhists, to support social action and ideas motivated by Buddhist values, and to amplify the voice of Buddhism in Europe and worldwide.”

And, more specifically, with the **EBU values**:

“We support the implementation of Human Rights, equality and individual responsibility for all, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, nationality, social origins, birth status or any other distinction.”

As well as with all the 10 **EBU goals** of the statement, especially:

“to build partnerships with other organisations to end discrimination and prejudice and promote human rights and the flourishing of all living beings.”

2. Activities of the network

2.1. connecting:

- The Rainbow Sangha is relatively new and we are still in the very early stages of setting up structural connections between European Buddhist LGBTI organisations.
- Basecamp could be a useful tool for creating such a network. An own website is another option. We hope to be able to set one of these up in the next year.

2.2. representing:

- 9 Apr 2018: Michael represented the Rainbow Sangha at the launch of **the Ozanne Foundation** in Westminster, London. This Anglican Christian foundation has been formed to work with religious organisations across the world to eliminate discrimination and prejudice based on sexuality and gender. In their own words: *'We want to see a world where all are equally valued, and their love celebrated.'* (In July 2017 the (Anglican) Church of England accepted Jayne Ozanne's proposal to condemn Conversion Therapy. Michael met with Jayne in Sep 2017. It was then agreed to work together in the future and form a broader coalition to stop this immoral practice (see more about conversion therapy below))

2.3. sharing information and events:

- Apr 2018: EBU Conference 2018 *Spreading Wisdom and Compassion in European Societies* in Málaga:
 - Dario gave a talk on 13 April: ***To Cure the Heart: a course in meditation for people who are HIV-positive.***
 - Michael gave a talk on 15 April: ***The Buddhist Pioneers of Same-Sex Marriage, A little-known history of compassion in action.***
- May 2018: Michael was a key speaker at the UN Vesak Conference in Bangkok. Although the talk was not about LGBTI issues, many people from various countries (The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, ...) contacted him during the conference with a request for more information about the Rainbow Sangha network. They were given information about the goals of the network and the videos and articles that are available on the Rainbow Sangha network webpage, representing different Buddhist traditions. **The high interest clearly reflects a need within the Buddhist communities.**

2.4. writing reports and articles:

- Summer 2018: Dario wrote an article in the first issue of the European Buddhist Magazine: ***To Cure the Heart: a course in meditation for people who are HIV-positive***
- Summer 2018: Michael wrote an article in the first issue of the European Buddhist Magazine: ***The Buddhist Pioneers of Same-Sex Marriage, A little-known history of compassion in action***

2.5. supporting social action and ideas:

- On 1 March 2018 - the UN day of Zero Discrimination - the declaration: '**Conversion Therapy has no place in the modern medical and spiritual world**' was launched.
 - *Conversion therapy (also known under different names such as gay cure therapy) covers a wide range of practices which have in common that they assume certain sexual orientations or gender identities are inferior to others, and seek to change or suppress them on that basis.*
 - *'Therapy' can be a misleading term, as these practices are often not limited to talking therapy. They can for example also include prayer, hypnosis or electroshocks. But conversion therapy is also associated with a culture of violence, both social and physical. Adolescents have been subject to 'reparative' interventions against their will, often at their families' initiative. In some cases, the victims were interned and deprived of their liberty, sometimes to the extent of being kept in isolation over several months. Their testimonies describe degrading treatment, extreme humiliation, physical violence, aversive conditioning through electric shock or emetic treatment, and even sexual harassment and attempts at 'reparative rape', especially in the case of lesbians.*
 - *Given that many conversion therapists are non-medically trained religious leaders, we thought it was imperative that religions join medical professionals in condemning these therapies unequivocally.*
 - *The purpose of this declaration is to underline the shared responsibility spiritual and medical professionals have to protect those who are vulnerable and seek our help from harmful interventions. We believe there is a shared duty to ensure that their needs are addressed in safe and confidential ways that respect their identity and human dignity.*

The declaration has been a great success. At present, it is endorsed by 14 European Buddhist organisations, covering all major Buddhist schools and traditions and stretching from Sweden to Spain (see attachment). Many more Buddhist organisations have debated it which increased awareness of this practice.

- Future social action:
 - We ask **all EBU members** who haven't done so yet to **discuss the declaration** and the document with background information within their organisation, so that the reality behind conversion therapy gets better known
 - We ask **everyone who is active in inter-religious dialogue** to **share the declaration with other religions and beliefs** and ask them to debate it within their organisations (several UK organisations have this on the agenda as we speak)
 - We also ask everyone who hasn't done so yet to consider endorsing this declaration:
 - If you want to endorse as an **organisation**, please e-mail a confirmation of your organisation's signatory to Michael (mmdv68-ebu [at] yahoo [dot] co [dot] uk)
 - If you want to sign as an **individual**, you can go the website which we launched earlier this year (at present we have 266 signatories): <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/ConversionTherapyHasNoPlaceInTheModernWorld>

Working towards a world where all are equally valued, and their love celebrated:

*Munisha, Dario & Michael,
September 2018.*