PRESS RELEASE

‘207 against 377’: Building momentum against Supreme Court judgement recriminalizing same-sex behaviour

New Delhi: More than 100 community stakeholders and activists came together today for a national consultation on Section 377 and the launch of Pehchan’s new advocacy campaign, ‘207 against 377’.

The ‘207 against 377’ campaign initiated by Pehchan brings together the 207 organizations implementing the Pehchan programme on a common platform to undertake advocacy at national, state and district levels to protest against the 11th December 2013 Supreme Court judgment upholding constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code thereby recriminalizing same-sex sexual behaviour.

The judgment referred to sexual minorities as ‘miniscule minority’ whose human rights are ‘so-called’. It is feared that the judgment will make individuals from sexual and gender minority communities more vulnerable to persecution, prosecution and violence.

Through the campaign, member organisations will reach out to various stakeholders including political parties, religious leaders, media and educational institutions to sensitise them on challenges facing these communities. The campaign will contribute to the discourse on Section 377 and how the law undermines fundamental rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. The campaign intends to influence general attitudes and public policies to ensure the protection and dignity of LGBT Indians.

Speaking at the event, Ashok Row Kavi, a leading gay rights activist, said, “The Supreme Court judgment was a huge setback for the community, but we are determined. Under the campaign we will reach out to community members and stakeholders at all levels and together push for change. It is time we all realise that LGBT rights are fundamental human rights.”

Pehchan is a five-year programme that strengthens and builds the capacity of 200 community-based organizations in 17 states to advance HIV prevention. Pehchan collaborates with India’s National AIDS Control Programme and reaches 453,750 MSM, transgenders and hijras by 2015 and is the Global Fund’s largest single-country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable sexual minorities.

According to James Robertson, Executive Director of India HIV/AIDS Alliance, “The fight against Section 377 will be a long fight. It cannot be fought single-handedly. The ‘207 against 377’ campaign brings together committed organisations and leaders to support a common goal. Collective passion and determination will make all the difference.”

The national consultation was followed by the launch of Pehchan Training Curriculum: MSM, Transgender & Hijra Community Systems Strengthening by Secretary, Department of AIDS Control, Shri Lov Verma, IAS.

The innovative curriculum was developed by community and subject experts as one of the first comprehensive community systems strengthening curricula focused on vulnerable sexual minorities.
Launching the curricula, Lov Verma affirmed the importance of the MSM, transgender and hijra communities to the national HIV prevention strategy and acknowledged the need for continued effort to control the epidemic among these groups.

Held at the office of India HIV/AIDS Alliance, the consultation and launch saw community leaders and members share their experiences and thoughts on the LGBT movement in the country and deliberate actively on the way forward.

Pawan Dhall, a gay rights activist and staff member of Pehchan partner SAATHII, said, “The Supreme Court in its judgment has cited the lack of numbers on the community. To take our legal battle forward, we need to document that we are not, in fact, a miniscule minority.”

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, transgender activist said, “Sexual minorities are full citizens of this country. Due to their sexual and gender identities, they are denied opportunities to earn a living, to study, and to access health services. The judgment multiplies the stigma and discrimination manifold. ‘207 against 377’ is our call for change in our country.”

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About India HIV/AIDS Alliance:
The India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) is a diverse partnership that brings together committed organisations and communities to support a sustained response to HIV in India. Complementing the national programme in India, it works through capacity building, knowledge sharing, technical support and advocacy. Through our network of partners, Alliance India supports the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to key groups affected by the epidemic.

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