**Protest**

**Against Intolerance**

Today in Haiti, Fondasyon Konsesans Ak Libète, FOKAL, (Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty), stands « accused » of « promoting homosexuality » for agreeing to host a documentary film projection followed by a debate organized by *Kouraj*, a local Haitian association working against discrimination that is based on sexual orientation or gender-based. In reprisals, FOKAL was and is the object of attacks (insults, individual death threats on many staff members, calls for burning FOKAL’s cultural center, calls to attack its staff at work and in their homes) so severe that the foundation chose to cancel the events scheduled to take place in their building. It was necessary to protect the staff and the general public used to the cultural center, primarily in view of the violence we commonly witness where apparently random groups terrorize in full impunity those who do not share their views or those who wish to debate freely on sociological issues. The decision to cancel was also made in view of the fact that certain public authorities seem intent on restricting or removing the freedoms of association, of opinion and of expression so dearly won.

The existence of FOKAL, an open space dedicated to dialogue, reflection and debate, is a significant asset for the construction of democracy in Haiti. The struggle of the association *Kouraj,* for the recognition and protection of the rights of a category of citizens must be understood within the larger perspective of human rights.

The flood of terms of loathing, of hate, of homophobia observed is a manifestation of the intolerance and obscurantism that are insidiously destroying the fabric of Haitian society. Behind the proclaimed motive of protecting society is a clear intent to undermine fundamental freedoms (freedom of opinion, of expression, of association), to impose an absolute truth through terror, to stigmatize, demonize and exclude differences, to maintain a confusion between pedophilia and homosexuality in order to characterize homosexuals as sexual predators. This retrograde current manifested itself in opposition against the rights of all children, including those born out of wedlock, under the pretense of preventing the destruction of the family. Yet Haiti is a country where the number of single mothers is very high and where the vast majority of unions are made by mutual consent and not by marriage. The same fundamentalist current uses the same methods of hate speech and intimidation against those who advocate for decriminalizing abortion (which is the third cause of the high rate of maternal mortality in Haiti and consequently a serious public health issue).

Haitian society needs to be protected against real dangers: ignorance; large segments abandoned to dehumanizing poverty or to fast increasing economic insecurity; unchecked demographic growth; impunity for rape, incest and pedophilia particularly affecting adolescent and younger girls; the current wave of migration; chronic political instability undermining the nation; corruption and games of interest to capture power; the growing fundamentalism that now plagues the social landscape, targeting most specifically women’s rights and the vodou religion.

In the face of certain public authorities making declarations that threaten fundamental freedoms, we wish to remind them of the indivisibility and inalienability of human rights prescribed in the Haitian Constitution which has integrated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as founding principle. Debate is a salutary exercise for community life and democracy. Those who resort to violence when short of arguments do not understand that the preservation of rights and liberties is beneficial to all of society.

Port-au-Prince, September 27, 2016

For reference: Danièle Magloire, feminist and human rights activist