

**NGO Written Statement for the 40th CEDAW Convention:
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Lebanon**

Presented by: Rasha Mounneh
Helem: Lebanese Protection for Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, and
Transgenders

Thank you Madam Chair. My name is Rasha Mounneh. I represent the Lebanese NGO Helem, the organization that submitted the report on violence against women based on sexual orientation. In Lebanon, the most overt form of discrimination against lesbian and bisexual women is the existence of article 534 of the penal code, which to this day criminalizes homosexuality, and which therefore also legitimizes all forms of social and institutional discrimination against us.

The reasons given for this continued and unacceptable oppression most often use the language of culture and tradition, claiming that homosexuality either does not exist in Arab culture or is a Western vice being imported into our countries. If we recognize that allegations of this sort continue to be used unjustifiably to halt the advancement of women's rights in general by those who wish to maintain an oppressive status quo, then we must also extend this understanding to women with non-conforming sexualities.

If the CEDAW convention is to remain relevant to women today and in the future, then it is imperative that it recognize sexual rights as an integral, important, and legitimate aspect of the human rights of **all** women. While we continue to push boundaries in our own country towards sexual justice, as women we look towards CEDAW to provide us with a rights-based framework that can accommodate our demands. We recognize and commend the difficult work the committee is doing on this issue, particularly in light of the more regressive forces at play on the inter-governmental level. We are now at a critical juncture: the principles of the CEDAW convention, a frame of reference for millions of women around the world, must not be betrayed. We strongly urge the distinguished members of the committee to uphold these principles and continue in their push for the equality of all women, regardless of sexual orientation.

Thank you.