

## “LGBTQ Rights” (12)

A lot has happened over the past ten years and for the LGBTQ community here in the U.S., a lot of good things. The legalization of same sex marriage, military ending discrimination against gays and lesbians, more LGBTQ members of Congress and more openly gay athletes and celebrities.

Some countries around the world re using the United States as a model for how to expand legal protection, other nations are not. They are moving in the opposite direction passing laws to outlaw homosexuality and cracking down on activists. To take a look back at the decade of highs and lows for the LGBTQ community, my colleague Marco Werman spoke with Lucas Mendos, he is a senior research officer at the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. He is also the author of the 2019<sup>th</sup> state homophobia report which tracks LGBTQ progress and discrimination around the world.

Marco began the interview by asking “Is the global LGBTQ community closer to equality now than it was a decade ago?”

Lucas Ramón Mendos: Well, to give you a direct answer, yes. Under that headline, of course, then there's a lot of nuance. And we have to clarify who is "we," because not all of us benefit from that progress equally.

**In the past 10 years, if we just look at the US, there's been the legalization of same-sex marriage, changes in social attitudes, and the government repealing the military policy "don't ask, don't tell." Compare those gains to other countries. Where have you seen more progress toward LGBTQ equality?**

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It is true that most of the progress is in the West. I would say the Americas, Europe and a few countries as well in Asia and in southern Africa, are making progress. In 2010, looking back ten years, only seven countries actually recognized same-sex marriage at the national level. But now it's 28 countries, and we've seen that progress take place also with regard to protection against discrimination, especially in employment. For instance, looking back to the situation in 2010, 49 countries protected us against discrimination in employment. Now it's 77 countries.

**Are there any countries you were surprised to see expand LGBTQ rights over the past decade?**

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Certainly that used to be the case with southern Africa that, you know, South Africa was the leading country in the whole continent. But now we see other countries making progress as well. Mozambique and Botswana also protect people from discrimination in employment. So South Africa is no longer a lonely wolf in Africa.

**Yet if you look at South Africa, a country with protections for LGBTQ rights are in reality, the violence still continues against the community. Why do you think that happens?**

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Legal reform and societal attitudes do not always go hand in hand. Sometimes you see one of the two factors changing before the other or legal reform pushing a change in societal attitudes.

**On the extreme end of the spectrum, countries that rank the lowest in terms of LGBTQ safety and rights are actually passing and enforcing laws that further restrict the rights of the LGBTQ community. Which countries are those, and what does life look like for LGBTQ people there?**

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Exactly. So there are still six countries in which the death penalty is effectively enforced, and those countries are Sudan, Somalia, a few provinces in Nigeria, Yemen, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The situation on the ground is extremely difficult. The people that were able to speak about the lived reality of LGBTQ people and those countries have actually fled the country before they were able to speak out. We wonder about the thousands and millions of people that are still living under those situations and cannot leave the country. It is very difficult for people on the ground to organize, let alone register an organization working on this issue. So the prospect of change in those six countries and in other countries that have similar laws is really dim.