

# The War Conference

Because they're making war against us

## A Call to Conference ... A Call to Action

We came by the hundreds of thousands ... over a half million of us strong. We came from all over America. We marched in Washington for civil rights and civil decency for lesbian and gay Americans.

We came to meet with our Senators and Representatives. We came to talk and to be heard. We came to bear witness and to be witnessed. We came to march arm in arm and shoulder to shoulder with more than a half million people, gay and straight alike.

We came to say that all of us are people. That we are all citizens and entitled to the rights of citizens. We came to say that we shall accept denial of those rights no longer.

We came to say that no one is a second class citizen, and that we shall be silent no longer.

Two days later, 3,000 of us went to the steps of the United States Supreme Court to assert that the Constitution of the United States is for us, too. The Court told us to go to jail. The very next day, 96 members of the United States Senate told us to go to hell. A week later, 368 members of the House of Representatives told us how to get there.

They didn't hear us. Or they heard us but don't believe us. There are those who remember that Jews were silent as they were herded into trains. They remember that no one cared as the gypsies were trucked away. And they remember the silence as homosexuals disappeared in Dachau.

They count on silence now. Our silence, and the silence of those around us. Silence and complicity. They believe that no one will object as they assault us. They're convinced that even liberals and civil rights advocates will timidly acquiesce - maybe even support - their efforts to keep second class citizenship alive in America ... to deny rights ... to stymie intelligent efforts to control AIDS ... and to spread their evil philosophy of "better dead than gay". And they know that, so far, we aren't sophisticated enough to organize ourselves into an effective political force that translates the marching of half-million Americans, and the strength of 40 million Americans, into strategic, forceful action.

We have made extraordinary progress in the nearly two decades since Stonewall. We began to conceive of ourselves, and establish ourselves, as a population, not simply as hidden individuals. We created organizations to serve our needs and represent our concerns, and media to communicate and inform. More and more of us came out publicly, determined that the

happenstance of our sexual orientation should not be an abridgement of our dignity and personhood. We gingerly asserted our rights under the laws of the United States and the several states. We didn't get very far, but we began to try, and by trying we began to create the environment in which trying no longer seemed futile.

We have made extraordinarily more progress in the decade of AIDS. We have established ourselves as more than an interest group; we are a community - locally and nationally. As society failed to respond to our needs, we responded to our own needs. We have taken care of our own with a compassion and dedication perhaps unprecedented in American history. And we have refused to respect the encirclement which society has tried to draw around us. We have reached out to all others in need, beyond our own community, because they share the same needs as we and we have much to offer in terms of humanity, experience, understanding and strength. We have taken the vanguard of the struggle against this plague in behalf of all the world's people, for we recognize the simple truth that so much of society still denies: that AIDS is a plague against everyone.

But we have lost so much ground, too. We have lost so many of our number; and we have lost so much of ourselves. AIDS has drained the resources and energy which we should otherwise be devoting to asserting our citizenship and building our culture. AIDS has fomented new fears and panic among those who surround us, building new barriers and chasms. AIDS has given new incentive to those who abuse us as victims of their ignorance, and new ammunition to those who assault us with their hatred.

We are gentle, loving people. We are fighting for our lives.

And now we are determined that we shall fight for our lives. We will accept second-class citizenship no longer. We will accept ostracism and repression no longer. And we shall accept abandonment no longer.

We are determined to resist the universal apartheid which treats us as non-persons, shunts us to the fringes of society, and would just as soon see us disappear.

We have many good gay and lesbian organizations in this country, locally and nationally. But we also have duplicative, wasteful efforts. And we have too many things that we have neglected to do if we are to marshal effective political and social strength in this country.

Our beauty and our humanity is in our diversity, but our strength is not in our dispersity. We are fighting for our lives because there are powerful forces making war against us. We must organize and mobilize to defend ourselves, and in defending ourselves, to assert ourselves as rightful human beings.

This is a call to conference. A call to a war conference, because, indeed, we are at war.

This is a call to some 200 lesbian and gay Americans to meet, to share concerns and exchange ideas, to identify priorities, to brainstorm, to build trust and a sense of common purpose, and to organize ourselves to defend ourselves. This is a call to design some system by which our various organizations and institutions, nationally and locally, can work together toward strengthened national effectiveness of our movement.

This is a call to some 200 leaders within the gay and lesbian community. Leaders and leading people, as activists or supporters. Leaders in national organizations; leaders in local organizations; leaders of local organizations which exert a national influence. Leaders not involved in organizations at all, but who are leading, bright, resourceful people within their communities who happen to be gay or lesbian.

We recognize that the 200 people we are asking to attend this conference will only crudely represent the breadth and depth and strength of gay America. We have limited the conference to 200 people because we believe that even that number stretches the bounds of effective, constructive group dynamics and the capacity to arrive at reasoned, consensus conclusions. We recognize that the list we have assembled is arbitrary and faulted. It is neither comprehensively nor proportionately representative. It is not necessarily even half male and half female; it is all gay or lesbian. There are valid constituencies which may not feel represented at all; there are other constituencies which will surely be over-represented. It is derived from awareness and randomness. We have not tried to consciously exclude any group or grouping, nor have we tried to weight or pack the assemblage.

We have tried, simply, to gather a collection of bright, committed, resourceful people - many of whom are experienced in some form of activism, whether actively or through more passive support; others of whom are experienced in the talents and techniques and resources necessary for accomplishing great tasks; and all of whom will be motivated by a social consciousness and a determination that gays and lesbians are entitled to equal protection under the laws of this country and equal respect among our fellow human beings.

There are those who will object to this conference because it is not perfectly representational, because it does not fully represent their constituency, or because it does not include them personally. There are others, even among those invited, who will fault it or object to it because the selection was arbitrary in its randomness or arbitrary in including only those of whom we knew. All this is valid. But the choice today - the choice in midst of the war which is being inflicted upon us - is a choice between being arbitrary and imperfect but doing something, or doing nothing because it cannot be perfect. We choose to do something, because the something which we can do we believe can be something worth doing.

This is a call to a national leadership conference of the gay and lesbian community of the United States. This is a call to mobilize gay America. Because for love and for life, we're not going back.