

September 2011

TO ALL CUPE CHARTERED ORGANIZATIONS

NOVEMBER 20 – TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

November 20 is observed around the world in memory of the transgender and transsexual persons who have died because of transphobic violence. For CUPE and other progressive organizations, this is an important occasion to raise awareness about trans struggles for equality and justice. Trans people in our workplaces and communities are among those most at risk of experiencing physical violence as well as more subtle forms of discrimination. Serious gaps in human rights protection and in access to services reflect and intensify this exclusion.

People who find their sense of themselves as male or female in conflict with the type of body into which they were born are widely misunderstood. Ignorance breeds fear and prejudice, even hostility toward the very existence of trans persons. This often means terrible struggles for self-acceptance and deep isolation, contributing to high rates of depression and suicide in the trans community.

We salute the trans athletes and presenters of the 2nd North America OutGames and the International Human Rights Conference on LGBTTI held in Vancouver this summer. Many CUPE members from around the country participated in that joyous affirmation of LGBTTI pride and are helping bring down the walls of fear and hatred.

Much work still must be done to change public perceptions and ensure recognition of trans rights in policies, legislation and practices at home and around the world. For example, most human rights laws in Canada do not include gender identity or gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination. Our *Criminal Code* hate crime provisions identify sexual orientation as a factor, but not gender identity and gender expression. A private members bill that would have introduced these changes in federal legislation was stalled by the May 2011 federal election.

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PAUL MOIST – National President / Président national CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX – National Secretary-Treasurer / Secrétaire-trésorier national

TOM GRAHAM – FRED HAHN – DANIEL LÉGÈRE – LUCIE LEVASSEUR – BARRY O'NEILL – General Vice-Presidents / Vice-présidents généraux



CUPE has a proud history of equality rights activism. We need to draw on that strong tradition in standing up for the rights of our trans sisters and brothers. Union members, staff and elected officers, we are all responsible for building an inclusive society where transgender and transsexual persons can live and work in safety, freedom and respect.

What can you do to help make trans rights a reality in your workplace, in your union and in your community?

Educating yourself and others about trans issues is a crucial step. Ask for the *Pride in CUPE* workshop to be offered to your local or at the next Division school. Check out the valuable resources available from the labour movement and equality-seeking groups. Contact the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to request copies of the practical guide about gender transition for union representatives – *Workers in Transition*. You will find information on the Egale Canada website at <http://trans.egale.ca/>.

Reaching out to trans people where they work and live is also essential. Promote and participate in events to mark Transgender Day of Remembrance in your region. Find out from the trans community in your area how union members can provide assistance and support year round. Use CUPE's *Bargaining Equality* binder to evaluate how your collective agreement protects trans members. For example, are gender identity and transsexual transition status included in a "no discrimination" clause? Do extended health care services include sex-reassignment surgery?

We must continue to fight for full legal recognition and protection for trans rights. Lobby your MLAs and MPs to have specific protection for gender identity and gender expression added to human rights laws and to expand the definition of hate crime to include transgender and transsexual victims.

Please share any actions that you or your local are participating in to mark November 20, by emailing equality@cupe.ca.

In solidarity and pride,



PAUL MOIST
National President



CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX
National Secretary-Treasurer