



COMUNIDAD

HOMOSEXUAL

ARGENTINA



SUS ORIGENES

ITS ORIGINS



SUS OBJETIVOS

ITS AIMS



SU HISTORIA

ITS HISTORY

Comunidad  
Homosexual  
Argentina

WHAT IS THE ARGENTINE HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY (CHA)?

The CHA (Comunidad Homosexual Argentina) is a gay organization which, even focusing on gay rights, expands its action to other social - areas. Its foundation chart establishes three objectives:

- to put an end to all form of discrimination and repression against homosexual persons.
- to further the understanding of and research on homosexuality by - means of interdisciplinary studies, to spread al information concerning it.
- to fight for full respect of human rights.

These objectives were set by our membership, in General Assembly. These aims have undergone slight modifications in wording, but not in their spirit, along these five years. The three merge into one principle:

"The free practice of sexuality is a human right."

The CHA was founded almost five years ago (1984), as a reaction - against police raids on gay bars. Repression was hard at the time, even if - our government had been democratically elected. This formal democracy was a result of the fight of the Argentine people against the military dictatorship, but it was also a result of the defeat of the Argentine army by the British - (1983), when Argentina occupied the Falkland Islands Malvinas to us.

During the long years of dictatorship (1976-1983) no gay organi- zation was possible, and repression was at its height, especially during the 1978 Soccer World Cup, when the order was issued "to clean the streets" of all - objectionable elements, which included homosexual persons.

When formal democracy was reinstated, the repressive system was left untouched. That was the reason of the raids. Against that repression system and to purify and strengthen democracy, the CHA came into existence.

Argentine society

In Argentine politics, the Church and the military exert huge politi- cal power. Our society is under the heavy influence of the most conservative - forces of the Catholic Church, and of a military leadership whose ethical ideas stem from the pro-Axis attitude Argentina adopted during World War II. The mili- tary overthrew the constitutional civilian government in 1930, and with interrup- tions the held control of Argentina until 1983, and they still threaten to take

over control once more. The interruptions can be placed between 1946 and 1955, and between 1964-1967. Except for these brief spells, since 1930 the National Constitution has not been in fores.

The CHA, in 1984, found a population used to dictatorship. Our people had been born in it. The morals of dictators do not include free practices of sexuality; instead, they had thought that heavy restraints to it were the - right thing.

Sexuality itself was under a moral ban because of the Church, and this ban had been endorsed by fifty years of bigoted governments. A complex legal machinery had been built to enforce the ban. These legal instruments are - still being upheld in many parts of the country. Since we are a federal Nation, the more conservative of the regional government are harder on us. Even in the main cities and regions of Argentina, homosexuality is discriminated against - and repressed.

#### Argentine society today

We are not living in a democracy; we are living in a weak state - of transition to democracy, jeopardized by the military, the remnants of the - insurrectional left and a severe crisis in our national economy and identity.

When formal democracy was reinstated, killings and torture stopped, but harassment to homosexual persons continued. Even if there is no law against it, civilian consent to unlawful procedures by the police and security forces - was more than any written law.

If we are unlawfully arrested because we are gay, no Argentine - citizen will come to our help. They do not know they have the right to defend us; they do not know that there is no constitutional law against homosexual persons; they just know that the police are putting people under arrest because of their being gay, or that the police are raiding bars, rounding up a few hundreds of - gay people and crowding them into cells for one or two days. "It has always been that way, it will always be", such is the popular notion.

The press or the media will not inform the population that there is no law against homosexuality, and that the police are acting unconstitutionally. Our people are used to the violation of civil rights, and no person, gay or otherwise, has been raised in Argentina on the idea of defending civil rights.

And this is where the CHA and other associations come in.

## Civil rights

Even if since 1947 women have had vote in Argentina, they are - still in many respects second rate citizens. We could hardly expect the situation to be better with regard to gay persons. A deep change is needed.

We started with the CHA itself. Both sexes are represented in the institution. Women have their own activities within the institutional frame of the CHA. Equal treatment, regardless of sex, is a principle upheld by Argentine legislation, and the CHA has a deep respect for it. The country does not.

The defence of civil rights for women bridged some of the distance with the feminist groups. Thus, we got used to unity in action with other minority groups.

In our country, dissent was for many decades considered a crime - and by many also a sin. In some cases, the law gave legal status to this. Since we are a federal country, the regional government of the Buenos Aires province - deprived homosexuals of their right to vote for several decades. We have fought the enforcement of this law,

In the Federal District, the punishment for the same crime (prostitution) is doubled in the case of transvestism. This is clearly unconstitutional; but the municipal law was passed last year.

Gay persons do not even know what civil rights they have. The CHA launched an educational campaign: "What to do if arrested", "What to do if you witness an arrest".

We expanded this campaign to the population in general. Argentines are afraid to claim they are free citizens. They have been reared in the awe of policemen and the military. So we approached the human rights organizations that fought for justice and civil rights. We have approached the Mothers of Plaza the Mayo, the Grandmothers, the Assembly for Human Rights, the League for Human Rights and other non-governmentally established or supervised associations.

We have also approached the trade unions, and with regard to AIDS we have been able to do some work in common.

We have found that so many years of dictatorship have left a deep scar, and that the souls of the Argentine people are still a prey to fear. We - still have a long fight ahead. To free gay persons from discrimination and repression means to re-establish the pride of defending of civil rights and equality - under the law in the general population.



We teach gay persons that they are citizenz, that they have constitutional rights, that they must appeal to the courte, that they must fight en-just laws; and we adhere to other civil rights causes and try to apread the idea that the free practice of sexuality is a human right. So society should be - - allowed to bar their citizens from the access to plessure through sex.

### Political partis, the CHA and democracy

The CHA does not belong to any political party, even if we understand that our action is political in the long run, because we seek a transformation of our society, from an authoritarian one to a truly democratic one. But in the short run, we are completely apolitical.

This gives us freedom to approach the several political parties to demand equal rights and just policies on sexuality. We have had practically no - answers. Nut at least sex is no longer a matter to be hidden. Sexuality is not a forbidden issue any more. Years ago, not even sexuality but happiness was out of the question; sex was permitted only as a means of reproduction. This is the - reason why we had no divorce law until two years ago. But homosexuality still - seems a dangerous issue to the political forces of our country.

However, some big steps forward have been taken, and many of these thanks to the existence of the CHA. Our appeareance on the Argentine scene -- changed the scenario of history. Public officials denied the very existence of homosexual persons, unless the latter were regarded as criminals, maniacs or - madmen. Homosexuality is now a topic under discussion. Homosexual persons are - part of Argentine life, and their rde in a society is to some extent recognized.

If the CHA were ever banned as an institution, or if through harassment and fear we were forced to dissolve the CHA, democracy will take many a - stop back on its paniful path. The CHA, by its very existence, strengthens democracy.

### Legal status of the CHA.

The CHA was born form several gay groups who coordinated actions - against discrimination and repression (1983). Slowly the groups merged into one organization which gave itself a statute (1984), according to Argentine law, so the CHA is entitled to national recognition as a civil association. The General Assembly of all the membership, called yearly, is its highest body, and elects - authorities.

The CHA has promoted the organization of other gay groups in C6rdo-ba and Mendoza, the second and fourth largest cities in the country, and has regu

lar contact with the Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual de Rosario (the third - city), which is an independent and uninstitutionalized group.

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When the CHA became a recognized institution we took a great step - forward. This enabled us to introduce ourselves to society through paid notices - in the newspapers denouncing police brutality and their unlawful methods, and to achieve a certain notoriety during the first years of this transition to democracy. However, lately the political situation has hardened, and our presence in the media has been curtailed by a growing censorship.

As an institution, the CHA is the only gay organization with nationwide possibilities. We define ourselves as a human rights organization, and our - recognition by our government is being delayed mainly by difficulties created by - the government itself. The system does not want a gay institution to attain full - legal recognition. However, the Ministry of Government is having trouble in its - efforts to stop our claim.

#### The AIDS impact in Argentina and in the CHA

When the AIDS panic reached our country, the blow to our efforts in the civil and human rights fields was considerable. The Church, the media and the police identified homosexual persons as the source of a plague. So we launched the STOP AIDS - campaign, which is still on. Its demands subtracted some efforts from other fields of the CHA action, but we did not abandon them.

Our campaign is directed to all the population, has specific messages to homosexuals, and is based on the urge to go on living, not on the fear of death. To undertake it was a heavy political decision, because we lacked funds, know-how and overseas support. But it was necessary, and it has been successful. We made an - impact on society, got to the media, gained access to health authorities, sanatoria and hospitals, and helped the ideal of gay solidarity to materialize. Moreover, we launched some unheard-of programs, such as therapy for personnel involved in the - care of AIDS patients, and formed a group for psychotherapy and support for the - sick and carriers. We even reached the point of giving financial support to hospitals and patients, and to those deserted by their families. We even paid for some - burials.

#### The CHA and its financial support

We have got none. We pay our rent and other expenses, partly with the fees of our membership, and partly with the money raised by organizing parties in gay bars, whose owners donate the use of the premises of the night. Our membership fees are low, because we need to reach every level of Argentine society; the ticket to our parties is always cheap, so we are able to raise funds and to convey to the

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gay community in general the aims of the CHA. We seek to achieve consent in the gay community, as well as in Argentine society as a whole.

The AIDS campaign works on the same basis. Both the CHA and its campaigns can carry on largely because of the disinterested help of many members. There are special fees paid by those who can afford it. We are all volunteers, and we collect small sums by visiting gaybars.

#### The CHA and the other organizations.

The CHA is based on solidarity. We gained access to the ILGA thanks to a Norwegian organization, which trained us.

Within our region, We have had contact with the Uruguayan group, and with some in Brazil and Peru. We favor unity in action with all other gay institutions and groups of the Latin American area. We feel that we have many problems in common.

Within our country, besides our relations with the few other gay groups, our non-governmental basis has made it easier to get in touch with social organizations. We have a satisfactory relationship with the Center of Studies, - Therapy and Research on Sex, with the Argentine Multidisciplinary Association for Human Sexuality, and others.

We have already explained our relationship with the civil and human rights organizations, and with the trade unions and feminist groups.

#### The achievements

In these five years, the CHA has proved able to provide services to the gay population, Both in the legal and the medical fields. There is a Legal Service, with lawyers working without fees for gay rights, and a Medical Service.

We have conducted a Campaign against the Act which enables policemen to arrest any person (gay or not) without any visible cause, and to hold him or her unconstitutionally. We got thousands of signatures, and we presented them to Parliament. The Act is still being enforced, but we made Argentines aware that this law is against the Constitution, and some representatives seemed concerned about it.

Our STOP AIDS campaign merited special attention by the Panamerican Health Organization, which invited our president to their last meeting on campaign for the prevention of AIDS, in Costa Rica. It is worth noting that Argentina was the only country represented by a gay organization, which is also a non-governmental civil association. All the other countries were represented by officials of their governments.

We have a periodical, issued when there are funds.

We had had a huge number of interviews in the media.

We have organized lectures.

We have demonstrated amont the other civil rights organizations from the very beginning, in favor of justice and freedom.

We have demonstrated against the Church who banned us, in front of - the Buenos Aires Cathedral.

We have obtained from the Supreme Court a reminder to all Chiefs of Police Precincts that the arrested are entitled to a phone call (which used to be denied to us).

We have exerted pressure on the Ministry of Government until the - raids in gay bars stopped, at least for a while.

We have become members of the ILGA.

We have a long way to go yet.

# Comunidad Homosexual Argentina

**Catamarca N° 469**  
**Planta Baja - Depto. "A"**  
**1213 - Buenos Aires**  
**República Argentina**



**Comunidad Homosexual Argentina**  
**ASOCIACION CIVIL**

**"EL LIBRE EJERCICIO DE LA SEXUALIDAD ES UN DERECHO HUMANO"**