

# Urvashi Vaid, head of the NGLTF Speaks at the March on Washington

April 25, 1993

Hello lesbian and gay Americans. I am proud to stand before you as a lesbian today. With hearts full of love and the abiding faith in justice, we have come to Washington to speak to America. We have come to speak the truth of our lives and silence the liars. We have come to challenge the cowardly Congress to end its paralysis and exercise moral leadership. We have come to defend our honor and win our equality. But most of all we have come in peace and with courage to say, "America, this day marks the end from exile of the gay and lesbian people. We are banished no more. We wander the wilderness of despair no more. We are afraid no more. For on this day, with love in our hearts, we have come out, and we have come out across America to build a bridge of understanding, a bridge of progress, a bridge as solid as steel, a bridge to a land where no one suffers prejudice because of their sexual orientation, their race, their gender, their religion, or their human difference."

I have been asked by the March organizers to speak in five minutes about the far right, the far right which threatens the construction of that bridge. The extreme right which has targeted everyone of you and me for extinction. The supremacist right which seeks to redefine the very meaning of democracy. Language itself fails in this task, my friends, for to call our opponents "The Right," states a profound untruth. They are wrong - they are wrong morally, they are wrong spiritually, and they are wrong ideologically.

The Christian supremacists are wrong spiritually when they demonize us. They are wrong when they reduce the complexity and beauty of our spirit into a freak show. They are wrong spiritually, because, if we are the untouchables of America -- if we are the untouchables -- then we are, as Mahatma Gandhi said, children of God. And as God's children we know that the gods of our understanding, the gods of goodness and love and righteousness, march right here with us today.

The supremacists who lead the anti-gay crusade are wrong morally. They are wrong because justice is moral, and prejudice is evil; because truth is moral and the lie of the closet is the real sin; because the claim of morality is a subtle sort of subterfuge, a stratagem which hides the real aim which is much more secular. Christian supremacist leaders like Bill Bennett and Pat Robertson, Lou Sheldon and Pat Buchanan, supremacists like Phyllis Schlafley, Ralph Reid, Bill Bristol, R.J., Rushoodie -- these supremacists don't care about morality, they care about power. They care about social control. And their goal, my friends, is the reconstruction of American Democracy into American Theocracy.

We who are gathered here today must prove the religious right wrong politically and we can do it. That is our challenge. You know they have made us into the communists of the nineties. And they say they have declared cultural war against us. It's war all right. It's a war about values. On one side are the values that everyone here stands for. Do you know what those values are? Traditional American values of democracy and pluralism. On the other side are those who want to turn the

Christian church in government, those whose value is monotheism.

We believe in democracy, in many voices co-existing in peace, and people of all faiths living together in harmony under a common civil framework known as the United States Constitution. Our opponents believe in monotheism. One way, theirs. One god, theirs. One law, the Old Testament. One nation supreme, the Christian Right one. Let's name it. Democracy battles theism in Oregon, in Colorado, in Florida, in Maine, in Arizona, in Michigan, in Ohio, in Idaho, in Washington, in Montana, in every state where, my brothers and sisters, are leading the fight to oppose the Right and to defend the United States Constitution. We won the anti-gay measure in Oregon, but today 33 counties -- 33 counties and municipalities face local versions of that ordinance today. The fight has just begun. We lost the big fight in Colorado, but, thanks to the hard work of all the people of Colorado, the Boycott Colorado movement is working and we are strong. And we are going to win our freedom there eventually.

To defeat the Right politically, my friends, is our challenge when we leave this March. How can we do it? We've got to march from Washington into action at home. I challenge everyone of you, straight or gay, who can hear my voice, to join the national gay and lesbian movement. I challenge you to join NGLTF to fight the Right. We have got to match the power of the Christian supremacists, member for member, vote for vote, dollar for dollar. I challenge each of you, not just buy a T-shirt, but get into your movement. Get involved! Volunteer! Volunteer! Every local organization in this country needs you. Every clinic, every hotline, every youth program needs you, needs your time and your love.

And I also challenge our straight liberal allies, liberals and libertarians, independent and conservative, republican or radical. I challenge and invite you to open your eyes and embrace us without fear. The gay rights movement is not a party. It is not a lifestyle. It is not a hair style. It is not a fad or a fringe or a sickness. It is not about sin or salvation. The gay rights movement is an integral part of the American promise of freedom.

We, you and I, each of us, we are the descendants of a proud tradition of people asserting our dignity. It is fitting that the Holocaust Museum was dedicated the same weekend as this March, for not only were gay people persecuted by the Nazi state, but gay people are indebted to the struggle of the Jewish people against bigotry and intolerance. It is fitting that the NAACP marches with us, that feminist leaders march with us, because we are indebted to those movements.

When all of us who believe in freedom and diversity see this gathering, we see beauty and power. When our enemies see this gathering, they see the millennium. Perhaps the Right is right about something. We call for the end of the world as we know it. We call for the end of racism and sexism and bigotry as we know it. For the end of violence and discrimination and homophobia as we know it. For the end of sexism as we know it. We stand for freedom as we have yet to know it, and we will not be denied.