



AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

14 January 2014

Prof. A. K. Kembhavi, President
Astronomical Society of India
The Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics
IUCAA, Post Bag 4
Ganeshkhind, Pune University Campus
Pune 411 007

Dear Professor Kembhavi,

The Council of the American Astronomical Society discussed at its annual meeting last week the recent Indian Supreme Court decision effectively criminalizing homosexual acts and thereby defining a large number of Indians as criminals. We believe this to be a step backwards for your country and are upset by the invidious discrimination it establishes. The Council has asked that I write in support of the Indian LGBTIQ community, especially those pursuing astronomical research.

The American Astronomical Society Working Group on LGBTIQ Equality, dubbed 'WGLE', has several goals highlighted on its webpage [<http://wgle.aas.org>]. Among the most important is to create a professional climate that respects and values diversity. The Society believes this is fundamental to achieving our mission of enhancing and sharing humanity's scientific understanding of the universe and, indeed, for the advancement of human culture generally. Only by treating people of all backgrounds and inclinations equally and involving them in research can we ensure the true power of thought and beliefs necessary to succeed.

I hope that you will do all you can, both as a citizen of India and as the President of the Astronomical Society of India, to ensure that those in the LGBTIQ community are not discriminated against, and that you welcome them to participate in your organization -- and in scientific research generally -- with open and inclusive arms, while working within your political system to overturn this regressive court decision.

Many cultures have tried exclusivity, bigotry and discrimination; they have never worked to advance humanity, but have only held it back. As scientists, we must stand against such thinking. I, and the American Astronomical Society, stand ready to assist you, your organization, and those in the Indian LGBTIQ community to secure the equal rights and inclusive involvement in our shared endeavor of astronomical exploration. Please let me know how we can help.

Sincerely,

David Helfand, President
American Astronomical Society
2000 Florida Ave., NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009-1231

CC: Niruj Mohan Ramanujam