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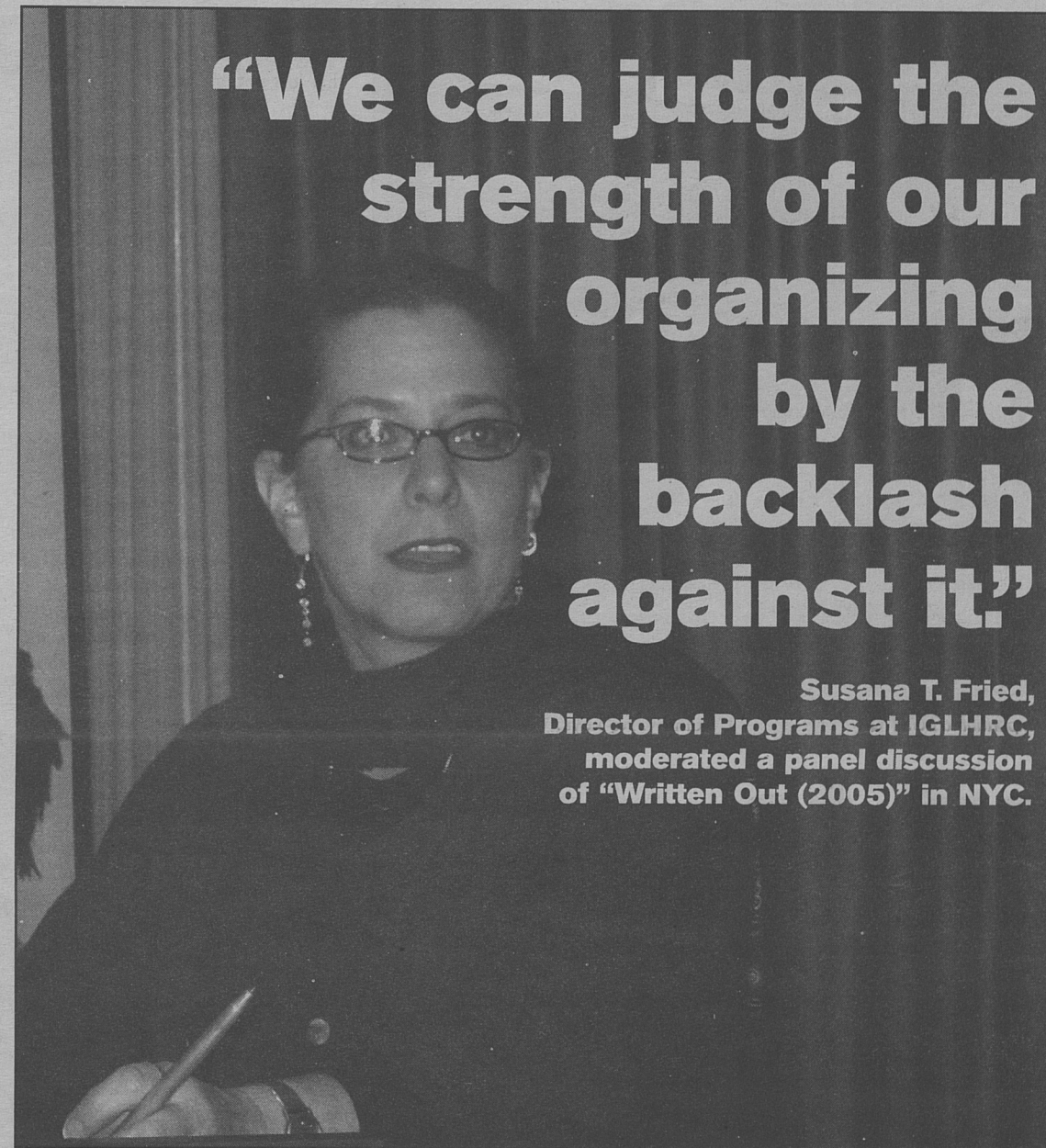
ments. Lesbian-baiting is commonplace and even widespread, targeting women in public leadership. According to the IGLHRC, there is "a seemingly universal dynamic for most women who dare to assert their leadership and perspectives as public advocates: the disparagement and silencing of their identities and political visions through sexuality-based attacks."

According to *Written Out (2005)*, in "lesbian-baiting," an individual, police force, government body, or the media will accuse women, openly or by innuendo, with being "sexually licentious, dangerous, immoral, perverted, or a threat to culture, tradition, the family, and moral codes in general." The attacks discredit the women, impact their ability to advocate for change, and stifle their freedom of expression. The goal is to force the women to abandon their work and to be silent. When lesbian-baiting succeeds, women cease their efforts at change or abandon issues of sexuality, and sexual and reproductive rights.

*Written Out (2005)* was released at the Beijing +10 Review on International Women's Day, March 8, 2005.

The Beijing + 10 conference was part of the larger UN annual commission on the status of women meeting. About 3,000 non-governmental organizations and 180 countries were represented. IGLHRC Program Director Susanna Fried said that about 10 governments talked about sexual orientation, and about 20 governments talked about sexuality and reproductive rights. While this may sound miniscule, Fried said it nonetheless represents "a huge step forward from where we have been in the past."

It was not until 1975, at the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, that there was an "ah-ha" realization on the international scene. It occurred to the United Nations that what happens to women and their children has a profound impact on the well-being of entire nations. And as a result of this shift, as women have become more active, more powerful, or just more desperate to improve their lives and to fight for freedom,



**"We can judge the strength of our organizing by the backlash against it."**

**Susana T. Fried,  
Director of Programs at IGLHRC,  
moderated a panel discussion  
of "Written Out (2005)" in NYC.**

## Sticks & Stones Lesbian Baiting Around the World

these same women are seen as a threat to those individuals and governments who cannot tolerate change.

At each of these international meetings, progress is noted. Huge gains have been made. More women are literate. More women are visible at high political levels. And each decade also reveals that women are still tremendously vulnerable. Women are poorer than ever. In Africa, people who live in

poverty, the great majority of whom are women, rose by 82 million in the past decade. Violence against women, particularly in areas of conflict and war, is rampant. At least some of that violence takes the form of lesbian-baiting when women are "too threatening," "too out-spoken," or "too independent," and not conforming to social expectations and tradition.

"Fundamentalist organization has become stronger and more

visible in the past 5 to 10 years," Fried said, "because we are more outspoken in fighting for our rights," she added. "We can judge the strength of our organizing by the backlash against it."

*Written Out (2005)* documents baiting incidents from around the world. The attacks can be insidious or explosive, state-sponsored or random. Documented incidents include: legal action used to snuff out a Catholic organization fighting

for reproductive rights in Argentina; sexually harassing phone calls; television coverage of women demonstrating with footage of police assaulting the women edited out before broadcast in Thailand; and use of websites to encourage broad involvement of the right wing to force the dismissal of Patricia Ireland from the YWCA for her "radical, bisexual, cross-dressing, and pro-abortion agenda."

The report concludes with recommendations for change. The authors place a lot of emphasis on the responsibility of members of the media to ensure that only real issues are reported and that fabricated and false claims are not given press or air time. They call on police and government to actually protect those they are charged with protecting and to not turn a blind eye to attacks on women. The report asks opponents of change to "play fair" and to discuss political disagreements on their merits. Finally, the authors ask allies to affirm the indivisibility of rights and freedoms, and to stand united in support of all human rights.

Fried also said in an interview that we need to understand that any woman leader in the human rights movement "puts herself at risk of sexuality baiting" that is directly linked to attacks against the LGBT community. "We're really talking about all human rights for all."

In what might be viewed as a victory for women's rights organizing, last month the U.S. withdrew its anti-sexual and reproductive rights amendment to the Beijing Platform for Action. The U.S. had submitted a controversial amendment to the Draft Declaration of the Beijing +10 proceedings. The suggested language stated that the Beijing Platform and the work of the General Assembly "do not create new international human rights and do not include the right to abortion." In spite of U.S. pressure, not a single member nation broke rank to support the amendment. ▼

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