



LGBTQI+ Rights in the Commonwealth

This conference statement was produced by delegates who took part in *Freedom & Sexuality: LGBTQI+ Rights in the Commonwealth*, a conference arranged by the Kaleidoscope Trust and Cumberland Lodge, 26-27 February 2018.

We are students, activists and researchers hailing from countries throughout the Commonwealth and across the globe meeting in the UK, and representing a cross-section of academic disciplines. The statement below represents our collective call for action following a two-day conference examining equality and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people in the Commonwealth:

We call upon the member states of the Commonwealth to acknowledge that LGBTQI+ rights are human rights. Every day, people across the Commonwealth face a high risk of discrimination and violence. Their vulnerability is heightened by stigma and marginalisation, resulting in poverty, rejection and other forms of harm - perpetrated on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics. They face discrimination at home, within the community, in the workplace, and in educational and medical institutions. They are denied access to essential services such as housing and healthcare, and are also vulnerable to exploitation in these contexts. All too often police and judicial protection remains inadequate.

While important progress has been made in some Commonwealth countries, the responses from most governments remain insufficient. Many countries still lack comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, or specific legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression of sexual characteristics. Serious human rights abuses continue without recourse to justice.

Of the 72 countries in the world with laws banning sexual acts between consenting adults of the same sex, 37 are in the Commonwealth. Criminalising same-sex intimacy gives legal sanction to discrimination and social sanction to prejudice, creating a context in which hostility and violence is directed against LGBTQI+ people.

The UK must reconcile itself with its history of colonialism, and its role in the entrenchment of legalised discrimination of LGBTQI+ people within the Commonwealth through enduring colonial era laws, and address its intrusive approach to its screening of LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers.



We urge governments to work with LGBTQI+ civil society organisations and human rights defenders and invest in sensitising their communities to LGBTQI+ concerns, encouraging them to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression of sexual characteristics. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018 is a timely and important opportunity for all Commonwealth nations to recognise the legitimate presence of LGBTQI+ communities in their societies and as such should strive to guarantee their rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We call on the governments of Commonwealth nations to:

- **Affirm that the rights of LGBTQI+ people are human rights as defined by the United Nations, and uphold these alongside the rights of those facing other forms of discrimination**
- **Commit to decriminalise same-sex sexual activity among consenting adults, and enshrine the rights of LGBTQI+ people in anti-discrimination legislation**
- **Adopt the Yogyakarta Principles plus 10 which affirm binding legal standards with which all states must comply.**

