



LGBTI People of the COMMONWEALTH







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THE COMMONWEALTH IS A VOLUNTARY

association made up of 53 independent countries from every part of the globe. It is home to 2.2 billion citizens, over 60% of whom are under 30 years old. The organisation includes some of the world's largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries, spanning across five regions. Thirty-one of its members are small states, many of them island nations.

This is the book of the **LGBTI People of the Commonwealth** exhibition, created by the Equality Network with the help of groups around the Commonwealth. The exhibition ran at Pride House, Glasgow during the 2014 Commonwealth Games, and since then has toured other venues.



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WELCOME



The record of much of the Commonwealth on human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people, is not one to celebrate. 42 of the 53 member nations of the Commonwealth criminalise many of their own LGBTI citizens.

During the colonial era, sex between men was a serious criminal offence in the UK, and shamefully, the UK exported that law around the world, by imposing it on many other countries. It is the original source of most of the anti-gay laws around the Commonwealth today.

In many parts of the Commonwealth, LGBTI people are denied access to healthcare, education, and justice. In too many countries, LGBTI people can also be denied their liberty, and in the most extreme cases can be executed, because of who they are or who they love.

There are also in the Commonwealth leading examples of good practice on LGBTI equality. South Africa was the first country in the world to introduce constitutional protection against sexual orientation discrimination. Canada has had same-sex marriage for almost a decade, and in India the Supreme Court earlier this year granted legal recognition to India's third gender communities.

LGBTI People of the Commonwealth is an exhibition which describes and celebrates the work of LGBTI groups and organisations from the 53 countries that make up the Commonwealth, highlighting their diversity, struggles and successes.



There is more content on our website.
www.equality-network.org/lgbti-people-of-the-commonwealth

PARTNERS



The Equality Network works for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights in Scotland. www.equality-network.org



The Glasgow Human Rights Network aims to bring together researchers, practitioners, members of civil society organisations and policymakers who address human rights issues.

www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/glasgowhumanrightsnetwork



The Kaleidoscope Trust is a UK based charity working to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people internationally.

kaleidoscopetrust.com

CONTRIBUTORS

We would like to thank all the organisations, groups and individuals working for LGBTI human rights who contributed content for this exhibition.



FURTHER READING

For additional content for this exhibition, we are grateful to Corinne Lennox and Matthew Waites, editors of 'Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalisation and Change', and to the Kaleidoscope Trust for their report 'Speaking Out: the rights of LGBTI citizens from across the Commonwealth'.

Everyone can learn about the issues by reading the free online book **Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalisation and Change**. The book was edited by Dr

Corinne Lennox & Dr Matthew Waites and includes chapters by activists and academics covering 16 states.

The Kaleidoscope Trust was proud to publish a report put together by the biggest ever coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) organisations from across the Commonwealth. Published in advance of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka in 2013, **Speaking Out** demands that Commonwealth leaders take action to stop the widespread human rights abuses against LGBTI people documented in the report.



[commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/
publications/house-publications/
lgbt-rights-commonwealth](http://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/publications/house-publications/lgbt-rights-commonwealth)



[kaleidoscopetrust.com/usr/library/
documents/main/speaking-out-
lgbti-rights-in-the-cw.pdf](http://kaleidoscopetrust.com/usr/library/documents/main/speaking-out-lgbti-rights-in-the-cw.pdf)



AFRICA

EIGHTEEN OF THE 53 AFRICAN COUNTRIES ARE MEMBERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH; they are located either in the middle-west or in the south-east and south of the continent, including in the Indian Ocean. LGBTI people face criminalisation in the majority of African Commonwealth member states with LGBTI people in the northern states of Nigeria facing the harshest penalties on the continent for same-sex acts, the death penalty.

Some leaders of the continent, such as former Namibian president Sam Nujoma, have made it clear that they don't consider homosexuality to be part of African culture, but a threat against it which was brought to the continent by the western colonial powers. However, a string of former leaders have, since leaving office, made statements in support of LGBTI rights.

One clear example of good practice in law stands out: South Africa. In 1993, the country became the first in the world where LGB people were granted protections under the national constitution. It is also the only country on the continent where same-sex marriage is legal. LGBTI South Africans are legally protected by some of the most progressive laws on sexual orientation and gender identity in the world, although for many, social attitudes have not yet caught up.

Despite some major setbacks to LGBTI equality on the continent in recent years there are LGBTI organisations and activists all over Africa campaigning against anti-LGBTI laws and working for a better future for LGBTI people in Africa. Many of these activists and organisations work against a backdrop of fear and intimidation and heroically put themselves at risk on a daily basis to progress LGBTI rights. They are making a huge difference across the continent.

Neither male nor female same-sex acts are legal in Botswana, and are liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years. Although same-sex sexual acts remain illegal, prosecution is rare and the country has anti-discrimination laws in the field of employment.

A number of LGBTI organisations work for human rights and equality in the country including Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO) and Rainbow Identity Association (RIA). LEGABIBO aims to create a community that is “educated and sensitised” on LGBTI issues; the organisation is keen to emphasise the similarities between LGBTI and non-LGBTI people. In August 2013, 14 members of the association went to the High Court of Botswana to challenge a decision by the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs to deny them registration; a previous challenge had been rejected a few years earlier.

The campaigners wanted the court to declare the decision of the Minister to be in contravention of Section 3 of the Constitution saying it denies them equal protection under

the law. On both occasions the registrar said that the country’s Constitution does not recognise homosexuality.

In February 2013 the first LGBTI film festival exploring homosexuality, trans and intersex issues was held at the University of Botswana.

The Batho Ba Lorato (People of Love) festival is the third LGBTI film festival of its kind in Africa after South Africa’s Out Film Festival and Kenya’s Queer Film Festival. The festival was an attempt to create a platform for dialogue through the use of film. LEGABIBO, who organised the festival, said their intention was not to promote homosexuality, but rather to create awareness and promote love, respect, tolerance, compassion and appreciation between human beings.

The Rainbow Identity Association is a non-profit making transgender and intersex organisation based in Gaborone, Botswana. It aims to explore ways of challenging transphobic laws and transphobia in Botswana. The organisation was able to legally register with the registrar of

societies in December 2010. Rainbow Identity Association supports transgender and intersex individuals with provision of a safe space where trans people can meet and share experiences. In November 2012 RIA hosted the first trans and intersex pride event in the country; the theme for the event was 'Live and Let Live'.



Botho – LGBT Lives in Botswana

▶ <http://vimeo.com/69577157>



- An attendee at the Batho Ba Lorato Film Festival

There are a number of LGBTI, Human Rights and HIV organisations working to support LGBTI people in Cameroon, where LGBTI Cameroonians face jail terms ranging from six months to five years and fines for engaging in male or female same-sex acts.

Organisations across the country are working in partnership to create a national network in order to share information and to speak with one voice to national and international bodies. As well as developing awareness campaigns to promote better access to health care, HIV prevention and the rights of LGBTI citizens, the organisations are monitoring human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests of LGBTI people.

CAMFAIDS (Cameroonian Foundation for Aids) is one of the organisations working in Cameroon. According to them the most pressing issue in the country is the decriminalisation of homosexuality, a campaign which has been made harder with a proposed bill that aims to strengthen anti-homosexual laws in the country. CAMFAIDS also works to stabilise the HIV prevalence amongst LGBTI people in Cameroon.

In September 2013, twelve local and international human rights groups penned an open letter to President Paul Biya urging him to accept and adopt recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the United Nations Human Rights Council, to prevent violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.

The letter followed the murder of prominent Cameroonian gay rights activist and journalist Eric Lembembe who was tortured and killed in July 2013. Mr Lembembe was the executive director of CAMFAIDS and a courageous activist who campaigned for human rights in his home country. Earlier in the year a student, Roger Jean-Claude Mbédé, was sentenced to three years in prison after sending an amorous text message to another male.

In March 2014, a lawyer in Cameroon was recognised for her work to promote gay rights in Africa with an award from Amnesty International. Alice Nkom has spent a decade defending people accused of practising homosexuality. Ms Nkom described the award,

which she received from the German branch of Amnesty International in Berlin, as a “prize of hope”. Despite being sent death threats and warnings from government officials that she could face imprisonment she vowed to continue her work.

“LGBT people in Cameroon face many risks. They are generally considered as animals or devils, so when you know that you see that they are in permanent danger. They can be injured, they can be killed, and they can be discriminated against. They can be rejected from healthcare and justice. So they are living in very bad situation in Cameroon – and they have nowhere to go and nowhere to complain.”

Alice Nkom

- Alice Nkom has faced death threats for her support for gay rights in Cameroon

AFP





Male to male relationships are expressly illegal according to the Criminal Code of 1960, as amended in 2003 (Section 104). The penalty for committing “unnatural carnal knowledge” between consenting parties is considered a misdemeanour and can be punished with up to three years imprisonment. On the other hand, female to female relationships are not illegal, but uncertain.

There are a number of LGBTI organisations in Ghana. GayGhana, which is an open platform for Ghana’s LGBT community; The Gay and Lesbian Association of Ghana (GALAG), which has been active for a number of years; Coalition Against Homophobia in Ghana (CAHG), which is a group of organisations and individuals which aims to counter ongoing attacks against gay people in Ghana, and Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights of Ghana (CEPEHRG) who are working with gay men in Ghana on Human Rights and HIV/AIDS. With the support of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) CEPEHRG runs the first LGBT health drop-in centre in Ghana that provides drugs to clients

who visit the centre weekly for treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

In 2011, Ghana, along with other African countries, was called upon by Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary General, to recognise the rights of LGBTI people. British Prime Minister, David Cameron, also suggested the United Kingdom would cut off aid to any country that failed to recognise gay rights. In response, then Ghanaian President, John Evans Atta Mills said his government would not support any legislation that would legalise homosexuality, he also said Ghana did not “discriminate against gays and lesbians, since there was no witch-hunting”.

A legislator in Ghana’s Parliament, Gifty Ohene Konadu, jumped to the defence of David Cameron saying “that homosexuals are human beings who must enjoy their rights and not to be condemned”. Asked whether homosexuality should be legalised, Konadu stated that the issue is a broad one that must be debated and critically analysed before a firm decision can be taken.



- Community outreach by in Kpando, Ghana by The Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights

“We say ‘in the game’, that is language to confuse people, it is not easy to meet other women in Ghana. It is dangerous. Everyone is against us.” **Rita Johnson**

Male same-sex relationships are not legal in Kenya, according to the Kenyan Penal Code of 1930, as revised in 2006, and the punishment is imprisonment of up to 14 years. The penal code does not mention female same-sex activity. Transgender people in Kenya suffer stigma and discrimination: the same laws that ban homosexuality apply for trans individuals, and trans people are not able to access gender re-assignment therapy.

The former president of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, who was in the charge until 2013, had never publicly issued statements relating to the LGBTI community in Kenya. That had the consequence of creating a comparatively less hostile environment for LGBTI people and has provided an opportunity for organising by LGBTI rights activists.

There are few LGBTI organisations in the country. For example, Ishtar MSM is a community-based organisation that advances sexual health rights of men who have sex with men. They work to reduce stigma and discrimination by creating awareness and

advocating for rights to access health care, including STI and HIV/AIDS related care and treatment. Ishtar MSM has a number of programs which include promoting social wellbeing by providing safe spaces for LGBTI people, health programs which include safer sex workshops and capacity building which involves training and development.

The Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) was established in May 2006. GALCK acts as an umbrella body for LGBTI organisations. It currently consists of five LGBTI organisations; Minority Women in Action, Ishtar MSM, TOMIK, Transgender Education and Advocacy or 'TEA', and Gay Kenya.

The vision of GALCK is a safe and enabling environment for LGBTI organisations and individuals in Kenya by promoting recognition, acceptance and defending the interests and rights of LGBTI organisations and their members. GALCK is expanding its activities in the country creating partnerships with friendly organisations, who by so doing provide LGBTI activists a 'foot in the door' opportunity to work

with new populations in different parts of Kenya. They say that “Any new partner always brings in an opportunity to reach someone new with our message and is always welcome”.

Early in 2012 gay activist David Kuria announced he would run for a senate seat in Kenya. The 40-year-old was the first openly gay black person in Africa to run for political office outside South Africa. Unfortunately, Kuria had to withdraw in November 2012 because of a lack of funds to cover logistics and his personal security.

On April 2013, a new Cabinet Secretary for Defence, Raychelle Omamo, was appointed. She had once called on dialogue on gay rights when she applied for the position of Deputy Chief Justice (DCJ). She said that lesbianism and homosexuality should be subjected to greater public dialogue to reach a lasting solution.

Children born intersex are put through ‘corrective’ genital surgery or pharmaceutical procedures recommended by medical practitioners and consented to by parents or guardians, to “fix” the child in their assigned male or female gender. Currently in court is the case of an intersex child whose birth notification indicated a question mark in the gender box. As such, a birth certificate could not be issued.

“I believe a time has come for transgender people to get their fair share of the world.”

Audrey Mbugua



He / She / It's Like This

Imagine if it were illegal for you to be you by Tristan MG Aitchison.

▶ http://youtu.be/RV_Wcel6yhQ

- Kenya gay and lesbian activists conceal their identity at a demonstration at Uganda High Commission in Nairobi on February 10 to protest a wave of laws against homosexuality in African countries



There is evidence of a gradual softening in attitudes towards LGBTI people in Lesotho, although male same-sex activity is still illegal as a common law offence. Sodomy is defined as “unlawful and intentional sexual relationship through the anus between two human males”; female same-sexual activity is not specifically outlawed.

In November 2010, the first gay support group, called MATRIX, was registered as an official NGO in the country. It aims to advocate for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. The organisation is the first of its kind in Lesotho and it operates freely in all ten districts.

For IDAHOT on May 17th 2011, LGBTI community members gathered at a local theatre to watch a documentary celebrating the life of a gay South African activist. In September of the same year representatives from MATRIX and the Ministry of Justice & Human Rights participated in a radio program seeking the views of the general public on LGBTI issues.

Last year MATRIX Support organised the first Pride Parade in Lesotho, the event took place on the 18th May 2013 as part of the IDAHOT celebrations. Also last year, MATRIX worked with Population Services International (PSI), a global health organisation dedicated to improving the health of people in the developing world, on the country's first HIV prevention programme to specifically target men who have sex with men (MSM).

The project will include the distribution of high-quality condoms and condom-compatible lubricants. Lesotho has the third-highest HIV prevalence rate in the world and, as is the case in many countries, MSM have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group. The criminalisation of male same-sex sexual relations, together with widespread homophobic attitudes, make it difficult for MSM to openly access the education, health care services and HIV prevention products that they need.

Being unable to be open about sexual orientation or gender identity is a challenge faced by many LGBTI people in Lesotho.

In rural communities in particular, traditional gender roles are firmly entrenched and those who do not conform are often subjected to discrimination and in some cases violence from community members. This is why the work of MATRIX support is so needed.

“Most of the time people’s views are based on a lack of knowledge. When we used to screen films in communities people would say ‘What are you talking about? This is satanic’. But now, I feel that people’s response is more positive. People are willing to learn more, to read more, and to engage in dialogue.”

Sherif Mothopeng

Photo courtesy of Matrix Support Group / The Hub



- IDAHOT marchers in Lesotho on May 17, 2014

Malawi's justice minister, Ralph Kasambara, announced in November 2012 that the country's laws banning homosexuality would be suspended until a pending decision, carried out by the Parliament, on whether to repeal anti-LGBTI legislation. Prior to the moratorium male same-sex activity was punishable by imprisonment of up to 14 years and in 2010 the Parliament passed a law criminalising same-sex activity between women which had not been previously criminalised.

In December 2009, Tiwonge Chimbalanga, a trans woman and Steven Monjeza were arrested after holding their engagement party. Five months later in May 2010, they were found guilty of having committed "unnatural offences" and "indecent practices between males" and sentenced to 14 years in prison. The then President Bingu wa Mutharika pardoned both individuals after 11 days.

Malawian LGBT rights activists have assiduously lobbied the government for repeal of the provisions that criminalise homosexuality. The justice minister's statement announcing the

moratorium on arrests was made in a radio debate with human rights activists, organised by two Malawian NGOs, the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) and the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR). The current moratorium reflects the effectiveness of the Malawian campaigners' strategy of engaging with the government in open dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) is a registered human rights organisation established in November 2005 in order to address the needs and challenges of minority groups in Malawi in the context of human rights, health and social development. Objectives of the organisation include: to advance the human rights of minority groups through advocacy and lobbying; to promote human rights and health of minority groups through civic education, training, capacity building, networking and research; and to provide support services for the improvement of the welfare of minority groups in accordance with their needs.

Despite announcements by former President Joyce Banda that “provisions regarding indecent practices and unnatural acts” would be among those “repealed as matter of urgency”, this has not yet happened. However LGBTI activists in the country say that the situation has markedly improved and that they are able to work openly for the first time in many years without fear of arrest.



“Being gay or lesbian or LGBTI in Malawi is the most challenging life that one can endure. They are not regarded as part of society. People have been booted away from their houses, some have lost their places in school and others have lost their jobs. However there is hope in the sense that the current political leadership have suspended the sodomy laws for the purpose of enabling people to look at the whole discourse without prejudice. If as much information can get to the people then that opens the window of change in the way people view the whole concept of being LGBTI.”

Rodney Chalera

- Steven Monjeza (L) and Tiwonge Chimbalanga (R) faced 14 years in jail

Although homosexuality is not specifically mentioned the Mauritius Criminal Code of 1838, sodomy “shall be liable to penal servitude for a term not exceeding 5 years” – this affects both mixed-sex and same-sex couples. LGBT people are protected from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, and according to a 2006 report, adoptive parents may be either single or married, meaning that LGBTI individuals are not specifically disqualified. In 2011 Mauritius supported South Africa’s historic resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity at the UN Human Rights Council.

There are two main LGBT organisations in Mauritius: the Collectif Arc-en-Ciel and Young Queer Alliance. On 17 May 2005, the Collectif Arc-en-Ciel (CAEC) was launched to fight against homophobia and transphobia. It has been actively involved in the well-being of the Mauritian LGBT community through ongoing social outreach programmes. Among their main projects is their active participation in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria through an education and prevention initiative. The Collectif has also organised the

annual Rainbow Parade which began in 2006. This year the organisation celebrated their 9th event which took place on the 7th June.

Young Queer Alliance (YQA) works in Mauritius to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation. This organisation was formed on the 1st February 2014 and it works with young people between 14 and 29 years old. On the 17th May 2014 as part of IDAHOT, YQA launched their video, “UNE ÎLE MAURICE POUR TOUS!” which translates to ‘A Mauritius for all’, and on the 7th June 2014 participated in the Rainbow Parade for the first time.



7th Rainbow Parade, Mauritius

 <http://youtu.be/xNvqReRr6sl>

C Photography



Perhaps owing to its history as a Portuguese, rather than British, colony there are no explicit laws against same-sex activity in Mozambique and as such in March 2011, the Minister of Justice declared during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review that homosexuality was not an offence in Mozambique.

The Penal Code does, however, contain an offence of "vices against nature" which could be interpreted as including male and female same-sex sexual activity. Mozambique is one of the only three countries in Africa to offer any form of discrimination protections for gay, lesbians, and bisexuals, which have been in place since 2007. The rights of gay people are implicitly, but not explicitly, protected by the Constitution which states that all citizens have equal rights, and are equal before the law, but does not make reference to sexual orientation or gender identity.

In January 2014, Joaquim Chissano, the former President of Mozambique, called on African leaders to protect LGBTI rights in an open letter to those leaders.

He wrote, "We can no longer afford to discriminate against people on the basis of age, sex, ethnicity, migrant status, sexual orientation and gender identity, or any other basis — we need to unleash the full potential of everyone". Chissano led Mozambique from 1986–2005.

Lambda is the Mozambican Association for Sexual Minority Rights, and it was founded in 2006. It is the sole LGBT NGO in Mozambique and, despite the scale of its work, it remains unrecognised by the Mozambican government. LAMBDA's mission is to promote the civic, human and legal rights of LGBTI citizens, through public awareness and education, advocacy and social dialogue.

LAMBDA's target groups are all LGBTI citizens, civil society organisations, political and governmental institutions, social groups, such as the youth, teachers, medical doctors, and the general public. The group are campaigning for the words "sexual orientation" to be included in the non-discrimination clause in the constitution to prevent discrimination in future.

LGBTI people believe that they are still treated as second-class citizens in Namibia. Male same-sex activity or “an unnatural sex crime” is illegal under Namibian common law and is punishable with prison time. There are conflicting reports about whether the law also criminalises female same-sex activity.

Despite the Constitution containing provisions for the inalienable rights due to every person in Namibia, leaders have verbally attacked LGBTI organisations and have repeatedly threatened to arrest sexual and gender minorities. In response, community members and activists came together in March 2010 to form Out-Right Namibia (ORN); the organisation is headquartered in the capital city of Windhoek with a network of regional leaders and support groups. Out-Right Namibia is committed to advocating for the human rights of LGBTI community members in Namibia by grounding themselves in the values of innovation, inclusion, empowerment, participation, passion, and integrity.

The Transgender Activists Movement of Namibia (TAMON) is a program that is aimed at the

advancement of human rights of transgender people in Namibia. TAMON currently maintains a transgender desk in the organisation ORN. In 2012, in collaboration with five other Southern African countries, transgender and intersex organisations gathered for a historic transgender conference. The project was funded by Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and delegates from Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana attended. One of the biggest challenges in Namibia according to TAMON is the lack of legal recognition of trans people. This means that while trans people may have medical access, legislation does not allow them to change identity documents and other legal documents.

In 2011 the first Mr Gay Namibia, Wendelinus Hamutenya, was assaulted and injured in a homophobic attack in Windhoek. He subsequently, in 2013, announced he would campaign for a position on the parliamentary list of the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP). He was elected to the national executive committee of the RDP's Youth League in May 2014.



Despite an international outcry and campaigning by Nigerian activists and allies both in Nigeria and around the world, the country recently moved to further strengthen its anti-gay laws with the passing of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act. Already in Nigeria both male and female homosexuality was, and remains, illegal. Chapter 77 of the Criminal Code Act 1990 states that any person who

“has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature” is liable to fourteen years in prison. Attempted homosexual activity is punishable with seven years in prison. Gross indecency between males is punishable with three years in prison. Twelve northern states have adopted Islamic Sharia Law and therefore punish male homosexuality with death by stoning, and female homosexuality with up to 50 lashes.



The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act was signed into law by President Goodluck Jonathan in January this year and adds new punishments for homosexuality. Punitive measures include: up to 14 years for anyone who enters into a same sex marriage and for same-sex couples who cohabit; provisions that criminalise the formation, operation and support of “gay clubs, societies and organisations” with sentences of up to 10 years imprisonment; and up to 10 years imprisonment for “direct or indirect” public displays of affection for same-sex couples.

Since the new law came into effect there have been worsening reports from the country, with rising incidents of harassment, blackmail, extortion and sometimes lynching of perceived LGBTI people. The most recent pressing issues being confronted by LGBTI people still centre on the new legislation and working with allies and expatriates around the world to exert pressure on the Nigerian Government to repeal the law. The law has also had an effect on HIV

prevention in the country and there have been reports of higher rates of infection as LGBTI people are afraid of accessing facilities and have gone underground.

Although the circumstances are very difficult, major cities in Nigeria have structured groups and networks and coalitions which have been formed nationwide to improve the two major needs of the LGBTI community in the country: health and rights. These coalitions try to oversee the activities of the smaller networks and groups to ensure a coordinated response to threats and opportunities.

The Initiative for Improved Male Health, formally known as Male Attitude Network (MAN), is a registered community-led organisation whose primary objective is to lead the effort of mitigating the physical, psycho-social and economic impact of HIV on vulnerable men through information sharing, advocacy, capacity building and economic empowerment. Their work in the country has become vital. »

- Nigerians in diaspora around the world have campaigned to repeal anti-LGBTI laws

» Since it has become dangerous to speak out about LGBTI issues in the country, many activists now living in other countries have taken up campaigns and advocacy in their new homes. Davis Mac-Iyalla is a Nigerian settled in the UK, and an Anglican Christian, who lived and worked in Nigeria until he was forced to flee in 2008, after facing imprisonment, torture, violent attack, and a string of death threats. He was one of the first Nigerian gay men to come out publicly and has campaigned for the rights of LGBTI people for over twenty years.

He co-founded Alliance Rights, the first gay and lesbian network in Nigeria, and in 2005 founded Changing Attitude Nigeria, the Nigerian wing of the international organisation Changing Attitude, which supports LGBTI Anglicans. He is a lay reader, a Knight of the Church of Nigeria, and in February 2008 received the “Bishop Desmond Tutu Award for Human Rights and Social Justice” from the World Pride and Power Organisation.

Another such activist is Bisi Alimi, who has led international campaigns for human rights in his

homeland. Bisi came out on Nigerian television in 2004 after the threat of being outed. He escaped to the UK in 2007 after being repeatedly attacked and beaten and after his house got broken into. Bisi continues to be a leading advocate for LGBTI human rights in Nigeria and around the world.

“Things have really not got better. I think since January they’ve gotten really bad. I’m sure you are aware of so many incidents, I’ll give you three examples. First, after the law was passed, the case of 14 people in Abuja, where a local pastor charged the community to break into their homes. They’re still homeless, they lost all their properties, they lost everything. And a few weeks after that, two gay guys were caught having sex in their own home. They were brought out, beaten, and forced to have sex and they were recorded. It went viral. And a few weeks ago, five guys were paraded naked, and made to walk around a region in south Nigeria. So things are getting really bad. Things that wouldn’t happen before are happening now.” **Bisi Alimi**

Although same-sex relationships are legal in Rwanda the topic is considered taboo with no significant public discussion of this issue in this East African nation. Reports from LGBTI Rwandans tell of harassment, blackmail and even arrest under various laws dealing with public order and morality.

The Rwandan constitution cites that all citizens are equal before the law, without discrimination based on a number of factors; sexual orientation and gender identity are not listed as protected characteristics. The constitution also says that “only civil monogamous marriage between a man and a woman is recognized” and therefore explicitly prohibits same-sex marriage.

Formed in February 2003, Horizon Community Association (HOCA) is an LGBTI community-based organisation that advocates for the rights of all LGBTI individuals within Rwanda. LGBTI people in Rwanda face discrimination and hardship on a daily basis, which has a profound impact on their quality of life. There is a lack of social services targeting the LGBTI

community, as Rwandan society and the Rwandan government prefers to deny or ignore the existence of an LGBTI community. HOCA was formed to address these challenges. Though still small, even its existence is a remarkable accomplishment.

The members find solidarity, can share their experiences, and can look out for one another’s safety. HOCA also serves as a platform on which to advocate for LGBTI rights and to sensitise society to the challenges that LGBTI people face.

Sadly in April 2011 HOCA was evicted from their office in Kigali, after the landlord apparently bowed to pressure from neighbours. HOCA leaders and staff reported receiving threats in 2011, and several fled the country.

Another organisation working in Rwanda is Other Sheep. It’s an LGBT/queer worldwide faith-focused community for networking and sharing resources on topics where religion and homophobia intersect. Other Sheep »

- » Rwanda was recognised officially as a local NGO in March 2010 and holds events regionally.

Despite some setbacks there has also been progress for LGBTI people in Rwanda. In 2010, Rwanda eliminated the criminalisation provision from its draft code and shortly afterwards the country signed two UN resolutions on sexual orientation and gender identity, one of only six African nations to sign.



- Staff from Horizon Community Association (HOCA)

LGBTI people in the Seychelles face a mixed picture of criminalisation and hope.

Although male same-sex conduct is illegal, and punishable by imprisonment for 14 years according to Section 151 of the Penal Code, the country has, in 2011, said it would decriminalise same-sex sexual acts. The Seychelles also agreed to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The agreement was part of the country's feedback to the United Nations Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review process.

Pressed on what the timeframe is for change, the second Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sandra Michel, said "the change of relevant laws would come pretty soon, as the government and civil society want so."

The changes have not yet taken place. Female same-sex conduct is not explicitly mentioned in the country's laws.

Members of the LGBTI community in Sierra Leone stepped up their campaign for LGBTI rights in 2002, with the creation of the Dignity Association. The NGO works to end discrimination by the government, police, medical system and schools. The group also provides psychological and medical support to a fearful and underground LGBT community. While the government tolerate its existence, the organisation and its members have reported that they are frequent targets of harassment and, sadly, even murder.

In 2004, Fanny Ann Eddy, the founder of the first LGBT-rights organization in the country (Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association, the former name for Dignity Association), was brutally murdered. Many human rights activists believed that she was targeted for being gay and for her work on behalf of the rights of women and the LGBT community.

Male to male relationships are illegal in Sierra Leone, as proscribed in Section 61 of the Offences Against the Person Act (1861), a relic of British colonial rule. Although rarely

enforced, punishment for “the abominable crime of buggery” is life in prison. Relationships between women are not expressly criminalised by this law.

Sadly according to reports, police continue to harass, detain, beat, and denounce persons perceived to be members of the LGBTI community. Social attitudes tend to be hostile to LGBTI people also. As a result, individual politicians, political parties and other political organisations in Sierra Leone prefer to deny the existence of LGBTI people in the country due to the conservative and traditional society. LGBTI issues remain a taboo, and violence against LGBTI people remains high.

The President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Koroma, warned western countries in 2011 against cutting aid money to African countries based on anti-gay laws. He said that “It is not right for issues to be imposed lock, stock and barrel from the international world (...) We have to take into consideration our culture, tradition, religious beliefs and all that. Such practices are unacceptable and we condemn it totally.”»

- » One consequence of this denial and hostility is that LGBTI people don't have access to life saving information on health care, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. In its outreach with gay men and male sex workers in Freetown and the northern city of Makeni, Dignity Association has found disturbingly low levels of knowledge of HIV and STIs.

Also working for human rights is Pride Equality (PE), formerly WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com (WCWGMC), which promotes, protects and provides services on human rights and access to sexual reproductive health services for LGBTQI young people in the country.



- Members of Pride Equality pose with certificates after a training session

LGBTI South Africans are legally protected by some of the most progressive laws on gender identity and sexual orientation in the world, although for many, social attitudes have not yet caught up.

South Africa was the first country in the world to expressly outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in 1996. The country then legalised same-sex marriages in 2006, becoming the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa to do so. All provisions that discriminate against LGBT people were repealed in 2008 and the age of consent was equalised at 16. South Africa also gives same-sex couples adoption and parenting rights, while allowing equal access to IVF and surrogacy and recognising the right to legally change gender since 2004. In 2000 South Africa also became the first country in the world to include intersex people in its anti-discrimination law.

There are a high number of LGBTI organisations working all over South Africa. One of them, Same Love Support Group Toti (formerly

called Pflag Toti), based in Amanzimtoti, describes itself as a support group that embraces inclusivity and is a safe place for all families to learn and grow together. They hold events covering different issues that face LGBT people, and they deal with homophobia and transphobia and its consequences. Their latest outreach has been to take part in a walk on Durban beach front. An inclusive church organised this walk in support of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). Families, gay, straight, couples, singles, trans, drag queens, rich, poor, all types of people were there to walk for “Free Expression”.

It was thanks to the campaigning and hard work of Sally Gross, who passed away earlier this year, that South Africa became the first country in the world to include intersex in national law with the inclusion of “intersex” within the definition of “sex” in the anti-discrimination law of the Republic of South Africa. Sally helped establish Intersex South Africa. More recently she participated in the first International Intersex Forum, in Brussels,

2011, and she was active in a number of online support and advocacy groups.

Another organisation is OUT Well-Being, based in Hatfield, Pretoria. OUT, which has been in existence for almost 20 years, is dedicated to the building of healthy empowered lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities in South Africa and internationally. OUT campaigns to reduce heterosexism and homophobia in society.

Triangle Project, based in Capetown, is a non-profit human rights organisation offering professional services to ensure the full realisation of constitutional and human rights for LGBTI individuals, their partners and families. Their three core services centre on Health & Support, Community Engagement & Empowerment and Research & Advocacy.

Working on transgender issues is Gender DynamiX, the first African-based organisation solely focusing on the transgender community. The aim of this organisation is to provide help, advice and information for those who seek to adjust their lives to live in the opposite gender »

» role, as to that assigned to them at birth, or who are working to better understand their gender identity. Gender DynamiX provides resources, information and support to trans people, their partners, family employers and the public.

Despite the campaigning and work of many LGBTI South Africans and allies there is much to do to make South Africa a better place for LGBTI people. Every year, hundreds of women and trans men report being the victims of so called 'corrective rape' in the country, and

many LGBTI people have been murdered in the country because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The work to secure a better future for LGBTI South Africans continues. In April 2014, the government launched Africa's first-ever government campaign in support of LGBTI equality. The launch event in Johannesburg included representatives from Justice, Crime Prevention and Security departments, members of provincial and



local government, ambassadors of various countries, a representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and representatives from LGBTI civil society organisations. The campaign aims to address the upsurge in hate crimes against members of the LGBTI community that have shocked the country in recent years and represents the first visible results of work by the National Task Team on Gender and Sexual Orientation-Based Violence against LGBTI Persons. The initiative was led by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development Jeff Radebe.

South Africa continues to lead the way in Africa on the rights of LGBTI people, and many around the continent look to the country for hope and guidance in their own campaigns for human rights.

On May 2014, the new Members of South Africa's fifth democratic Parliament were sworn in, and Zakhele Mbhele became the first openly-gay black Member of Parliament on the continent.

Mbhele, representing the official opposition, is just 29 years old but comes with a proud LGBT activist heritage. He headed up the University of Witwatersrand's LGBT campus group when he studied there and served on the board of Johannesburg Pride for a number of years.

"I am intersexed, born, like most of the people born with bodies which are such that intersexuality has a significant impact on their lives, with ambiguous genitalia... Intersexuality is often pathologised and people like myself who are intersexed are often seen as pathological specimens. There is something I must make clear at the outset. I, and others like me, are first and foremost persons possessed of intrinsic dignity. We are not specimens of any pathology, and I stand before you as a person in the full-blown Lockean sense, a thinking, intelligent being no less possessed of reason and reflection than yourselves, indubitably capable of considering myself as myself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places." **Sally Gross**

- Members of the Same Love based in Amanzimtoti in South Africa



The clandestine nature of LGBTI activities in Swaziland “may increase risk-taking”, as LGBTI people “feel they have no recourse to bring incidents of abuse to the authorities” a SWAPOL (Swaziland for Positive Living) report says.

SWAPOL is an organisation which provides a holistic approach for improving the quality of life for HIV infected and affected people in rural communities.

Many of those who reveal themselves as LGBTI face censure and exclusion from their chiefs, pastors and members of Government, who have criticised same sex conduct as neither Swazi nor Christian. LGBTI advocacy organisations face difficulty registering with the government; this is why LGBTI organisations, such as House of Our Pride (HOOP), are so vital, both in attempting to stop the spread of HIV and advocating for equal rights for LGBTI people.

Such organisations try to ensure day-to-day care and survival, medical and otherwise, for LGBTI people who in many cases are discriminated against by government-controlled

institutions, such as Swaziland’s underfunded medical clinics.

Male to male relationships are illegal in Swaziland, as sodomy is prohibited as a common law offence. Although female to female relationships are not illegal at the moment, the government has plans to include prohibitions of all male homosexual acts and lesbian acts in its revision of the sexual offences laws.

The proposed penalties are imprisonment for a minimum period of two years and less than 10 years, or a minimum fine of E5,000. LGB people are prohibited by law from entering the country.

While some LGBTI people have been able to migrate to South Africa, many LGBTI people face growing discrimination at home. In late 2012, Nkwene Member of Parliament Aaron Sotsha Dladla suggested that Parliament must enact a new law banning gays and lesbians in the kingdom, and in 2013, Swaziland’s Prime Minister, Barnabas Dlamini, called homosexuality “an abnormality and a sickness.”

An example of the discrimination faced by LGBTI Swazis is that two gay men were banished from their Swazi communities in August 2013, because of their sexual orientation. The two men aged 18 & 21 were living with an aunt when neighbours raised suspicions over the nature of their relationship.

When confronted they admitted to being gay. A member of the community police noted that there was an increasing concern about the growing “bad tendencies” and they, together with responsible residents, were on a mission of getting rid of all bad elements.



- Supporters of House of our Pride (HOOP)

In March 2013, Ezekiel Wenje, from the main opposition Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo party, told The East African newspaper that he had given the Tanzanian parliament notice of his intention to draft a new harsher law against same-sex relationships.

Mr Wenje said homosexuality is on the rise in Tanzania because the existing legislation does not provide a sufficient deterrent. This is despite same-sex conduct, between men or women, being illegal under the sections of the Penal Code which deal with ‘Unnatural Offences’ and ‘Gross Indecency’. The penalty is imprisonment of 30 years to life.

There have been a number of alarming cases of discrimination and violence reported by LGBTI people in Tanzania.

In 2009, Alex, a transgender man, was sexually assaulted by the police at Buguruni Police Station in Dar es Salaam. He was 18 at the time. The manager at the bar where he worked, who accused him of being a lesbian and having a “bad attitude”, turned him in to the police. »

» When Alex arrived at the police station, he said, police told him to take off his clothes and touched his breasts and vagina. They beat him on his arms and back with a belt and then forced him to wear women's clothing and clean the police station. He was released after six days, and said, "I did not make a complaint. I was afraid."

Also, sadly, on July 30 2012, LGBTI rights advocate Morris Mjomba was found murdered and mutilated in his home in Dar es Salaam. Mjomba worked with the LGBTI Support Unit of the Centre for Human Rights Promotion. Police opened an investigation of the killing, but no arrests have been reported.

Despite the anti-LGBTI climate in the country there are active LGBTI organisations in Tanzania working to support LGBTI human rights. LGBT Voice Tanzania (formerly called WEZESHA) was founded in 2009. Its mission is to promote, support, defend, and protect the interests and the general well-being of LGBT people in Tanzania. They work tirelessly in direct aid to individuals in crisis, campaign

for health care access and provide political advocacy, education and a positive face for the media. Their latest and most ambitious project is the creation of the nation's first free LGBT-friendly clinic which will serve hundreds of Tanzanians who currently are not able to access health care because of homophobia and discrimination. The clinic will provide counselling, HIV prevention, and treatment.

Also working on LGBTI issues in the country are Wake Up and Step Forward Tanzania, which is a coalition dealing with sexual health awareness for Men who have Sex with Men, and Stay Awake Network Activities, which is a community-based organisation dealing with sexual health awareness for key populations and the general population within Tanzania. Their mission is to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country.



Pride

LGBT VOICE Tanzania held a pride event to show solidarity with LGBT Ugandans.

► <http://youtu.be/FPee890dyGM>



- LGBT VOICE members take part in an LGBT pride in March 2014



LGBTI people in Uganda face some of the most repressive laws on the continent and the country has been the focus of intense international attention after President Museveni signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act into law earlier in 2014.

While homosexuality has always been illegal under the Ugandan penal code, as in many former British colonies, the new law further increased the punishments for homosexuality and even brought in punishments for those who might advocate for or support gay or lesbian people. Provisions

included: life imprisonment for “the offence of homosexuality”; seven years for “attempting to commit homosexuality”; and between five and seven years in jail or a £24,500 fine or both for the promotion of homosexuality. However, on 1st August 2014, the Constitutional Court struck down the Anti-Homosexuality Act, on the grounds that the Ugandan Parliament had been inquorate when it was passed.

Despite the stigma and criminalisation, there are still LGBTI organisations bravely working



in Uganda. For example, Spectrum Uganda Initiative, which is a non-governmental organisation with a mission to be a respected advocate for the gay community in Uganda.

Through HIV/AIDS and human rights campaigns, it aims to provide health services to the MSM community in Uganda and advocate for the recognition, protection and actualisation of LGBTI rights.

Forum for Minority Rights (FMR) is a not-for-profit community based lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and sex workers organisation. In Uganda, it is the first organisation that was formed by students. FMR was formed in 2010 by a group of university activists who felt the urge to fill the missing link in the way activism was done in universities and other institutions of higher learning. Their work on campus has been made all the more difficult with the passing of the new law.

Rainbow Health Foundation, founded in July 2010, is an organisation that aims to support

and empower LGBT communities in Western Uganda, thus creating a society that is proud and confident of their sexuality.

Icebreakers Uganda is a support organisation formed in 2004 that caters for LGBTI Ugandans 18 years and over who are 'coming out', as well as men and women who are already 'out', or having feelings of loneliness or isolation due to sexuality or sexual related orientation. Icebreakers Uganda also educates men and women about their sexual health with regard to risky sexual behaviours with much emphasis on HIV/Aids and STIs in line with promoting their human rights. Icebreakers Uganda is a member of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) which is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that works towards achieving full legal and social equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people in Uganda. It is the umbrella organisation of all LGBTI organisations in Uganda. SMUG director Frank Mugisha has been a leading figure in campaigning against the Anti-Homosexuality Act despite huge risk to his own safety. »

- Ugandans celebrate at a gay pride event before new anti-LGBTI laws had been passed

- » In terms of HIV prevention, efforts for LGBT people in Uganda, who are included among those most at risk of infection, are improving during the last few years.

Because of the difficulties for LGBTI people in Uganda, many Ugandans have fled and continue to advocate for LGBTI rights from abroad. One such group is Uganda Gay On Move (UGOM), it is a community group and organisation of LGBT people from Uganda united in the Netherlands, that was founded in January 2013 by LGBT asylum seekers. UGOM aims at opening up a dialogue within Dutch society and the international community, and in particular within the Ugandan and African community concerning LGBT affairs. Therefore UGOM focuses on reaching LGBT Ugandans and the African community at large.

“This guy asked me whether I was married. I said no, I love men, I don’t love women. He was interested, we exchanged numbers. We met the next day and he took me on his boda (motorcycle). Then he said he had run out

of fuel, so I got off. There were policemen waiting. One slapped me. The one from my tribe said I was shaming them. He said he would call the media and put my picture in the newspaper. I got very scared. They took me to the police station. I had to write that I wanted to sodomise the guy. I refused. They were humiliating me, pushing me with their guns. They told me the guy wanted 1.5 million shillings (around £200). I had 15,000 in my wallet. They took it. I said I could raise only 300,000. It was money to pay my brother’s school fees. I hired a taxi and went to my place with two policemen. The driver and one policeman stood outside. I went inside with the other policeman and gave him the money. I was released at 3:00 am.” **Anonymous**



**Hope for the Future – Envisioning
Global LGBT Human Rights and
SMUG: Sexual Minorities Uganda
with Voices of the Abasiyazzi**

International Day Against
Homophobia and Transphobia, May
2013, Kampala, Uganda.

▶ <http://vimeo.com/73786262>

According to a 2010 survey, 98% of the Zambian population disapprove of homosexual behaviour and newspaper headlines such as “Cage Homos” are commonplace. Anti-LGBTI sentiment is also seen in Zambia’s laws.

Both male and female same-sex sexual conduct is illegal in Zambia and can be punished by imprisonment of not less than 15 years and possibly for life.

Friends of Rainka works in Zambia to support a study on the health situation of men who have sex with men (MSM). The organisation has partnered with some of the most visible LGBT activists in the country, who are also part of informal regional networks of LGBT groups. In October 2011, a group of Zambian activists took part in advocacy training in Sweden in order to engage the Zambian government on minority sexual rights. The three-week long training was attended by 50 activists from all over Africa. The Zambian delegation was led by the Executive Director of Friends of Rainka, Brian Chanda Mubanga.

In a landmark case in Zambia two men James Mwape, 20, and 21 year old Philip Mubiana, from the northern town of Kapiri Mposhi, were rearrested just four days after an initial arrest on charges practising sex against the order of nature. Their arrest was due to reports received by police from a neighbour, and if convicted, they could face time in prison. Campaigners around the world have been active in calling for Zambia to release the pair arguing that punishing the couple’s consensual same-sex activity in private goes against international law. After being held for over a year the pair were acquitted by a Zambian court on July 3rd 2014.

“I successful completed my law degree in 2012, which allowed me to engage in full time activism, championing for the rights of sexual minorities in Zambia in all spheres of their lives. Over a couple of months ago, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has been targeting LGBT persons, calling for their blood. The result being state sponsored homophobia, the likes that the country has never seen before post-independence. »

» “I spoke out; condemning governments hate speech, persecutions and arbitrary arrests directed towards a sexual minority group that had done nothing to the state. I was quoted on an online media tabloid, with my image splashed all over the front page. Furthermore, given the fact that I am a gay man, who equally belongs to this oppressed group. The consequence, of that interview has till now

lead me to being ostracized from my family for raising my voice and also, for being gay. It's been over seven months and counting ever since any of my family members spoke, nor laid eyes on me. They refuse have refused to accept me for who I am and worse off, because I advocate for what I believe in. I can never back home now, as home is now become a memory in my past.” **Charles**

- James Mwape, 20, and 21 year old Philip Mubiana were released and acquitted of charges “against the order of nature” in July 2014



CARIBBEAN AND AMERICAS

OF 13 COMMONWEALTH MEMBER COUNTRIES IN THE AMERICAS, ONLY BELIZE, CANADA and Guyana lie on the main continental landmass; all the others are islands or archipelagos. Every Commonwealth nation can be found around the middle of the American continent with the exception of Canada which is in the north. Canada also has thirty times more land mass than all the other Commonwealth nations in the region put together. All members have an equal say in the Commonwealth – regardless of size.

LGBTI people throughout the region have differing rights and responsibilities due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex, but many face the same challenges in overcoming draconian anti-LGBTI laws and seeking protections from discrimination. In Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean, Central and Southern Americas, LGBTI people face the harshest penalties in the whole region, but they are campaigning hard, forming civil society alliances, and pursuing strategic litigation, to ensure new rights and freedoms.

LGBTI people in Antigua and Barbuda are not equal under the law and face harsh penalties for consensual same-sex activity. The Sexual Offences Act 1995 prescribes the punishment for buggery from fifteen years (between adults) to five years (for minors).

There are also laws around indecency, which affect both women and men and carry a maximum penalty of five years. MESH, an organisation working for LGBTI human rights (see below), indicate that these laws are not actively implemented.

It is not only in the law that LGBTI people face discrimination on the island nation. For the Antiguan Resilience Collective Inc. (ARC), an organisation working for an Antigua and Barbuda where people do not experience social exclusion or marginalisation based on nationality, HIV status, sexual orientation, gender or class and have equal access to sexual reproductive health and HIV services, the most important issues facing LGBTI people are social stigma and discrimination.

While there are daily violations of the human rights of LGBTI people in Antigua and Barbuda, ARC says things are changing: “Life for LGBTI people has changed in the sense that the issues are now being discussed via media and NGOs have been lobbying for better services as it relates to health care and other social services.”

In 2012 the government in Antigua and Barbuda was criticised by a prominent human rights lawyer, Sir Clare K. Roberts, KCN, QC, for voting against a historic UN resolution committing countries to take steps to end acts of violence, criminal sanctions and related human rights violations committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Sir Clare said the government should have taken the lead in the local fight to reduce stigma and discrimination against sexual orientation discrimination by signing a recent United Nations statement on LGBT Rights.

- Orin Jerrick (second from the left) is the founder of MESH, a new activist group for LGBT people in Antigua

This frustration is shared by ARC, who say that LGBTI people and organisations in Antigua and Barbuda are tired that government has signed conventions and treaties which support changes to anti-LGBTI laws, but does not follow through and make changes to the law, while LGBTI human rights are violated on a daily basis and there is no political will to make changes to the constitution.

Another organisation working for LGBTI human rights in Antigua and Barbuda is Meeting Emotional and Social Needs Holistically (MESH). MESH has received support for their work, and in 2011, the organisation was represented at a three-day Safety and Security

Training Workshop for Human Rights defenders in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

Both MESH and ARC recently took part in United, a two-day workshop organised by the US Embassy to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean and the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Alliance (CHAA). The event focused on improving media and communications skills for grassroots LGBT civil society groups.

“Members of the LGBTI community experience rejection and alienation by the society at »



» large based on sexual orientation and or sexual identity. Our cultural norms dictate that homosexuality is a sin and our laws seek to invade the privacy of our homes by dictating with whom and the nature of sexual activity is allowable. Safe spaces for socialising are minimal and as such the LGBTI community is forced to meet in secluded places and to dress in keeping with traditional norms. These societal gender biases are indeed affecting the wellbeing of the LGBTI community and severely impacts on their mental status.

“Because of my profession I find life for me as a gay man in Antigua and Barbuda very unique from the rest of the population. I am able to go into areas where person would normally have challenges going. However, this does not say I do not faced with some degree stigma and discrimination. The discrimination I faced is from some of my colleagues. For example, my supervisor clearly identify my sexual orientation as an abominable sin and urged me to get into a relationship that is right in the sight of God and man or I will go to ‘Hell’.” **Orin Jerrick**

The Bahamas decriminalised homosexuality in 1991 however it still maintains an unequal age of consent, 16 for mixed-sex acts and 18 for same-sex acts. There is no legislation that provides protection from human rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Constitutional Review Commission set up in 2006 “found that sexual orientation did not deserve protection against discrimination.”

In June 2011, despite not having a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, The Bahamas supported a resolution which affirmed equal rights for LGBTI people. “Our record is clear, we continue to support freedom of expression and the right for people to express their opinions”, said then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brent Symonette.

There is a growing debate about LGBTI issues in the Bahamas. In June 2013 the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Michael Barnett told lawyers that “Bahamian courts will soon have to address the issue of same-

sex marriages” and in 2014 after a number of comments and speeches in support of the rights of LGBTI people, the current Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell said that he felt his career had suffered because of his support for LGBTI equality, “Do we as a society, for example, condone violence against people simply because of their sexual orientation”, he asked.

Bahamas LGBT Equality Advocates are a non-profit LGBT support and advocacy organisation based in Nassau. They stand against homophobia, agitate for the removal of laws that discriminate against LGBT people, and fight stigma and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and HIV status. Established in July 2011, they are members of the Bahamas Human Rights Network and Civil Society Bahamas, an umbrella group for non-governmental organisations. »

- Miss Teen Bahamas 2005, Gari McDonald, was stripped of her title after coming out as a lesbian



» “I am a victim of both crime and discrimination. I am a victim of stalking, for more than four years. I am unable to convince the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) that it is their duty to fully investigate these matters. I have reported both the crimes and the instances of discrimination to the RBPF, to the Commissioner of Police and directly and to the Prime Minister.

“We (members of the LGBTI community) have been unable to convince the Royal Bahamas Police Force that it is their duty to record this information... when processing a crime. The fact that our government does not have the capacity to record instances of crime, violence and discrimination against the LGBT community does not mean that members of the LGBT community have not attempted to have these instances recorded by official mechanisms.”

Erin Greene

The country’s Sexual Offences Act (2002) includes the heaviest penalties for same-sex activity in the Western hemisphere. Section 9 of the Act imposes a sentence of up to life imprisonment for ‘buggery’.

Section 12 includes a provision against “serious indecency” – which can be taken to apply to both male and female same-sex activity. Like many anti-LGBTI laws in the Commonwealth these laws were originally imposed during the period of British colonial rule and appear to be constitutionally entrenched and difficult to challenge. In February 2013, the Universal Periodic Review again recommended that Barbados repeal antigay laws; this was rejected by the Government, although they did accept recommendations to “implement measures to protect the LGBT population from harassment, discrimination and violence.”

It is important to note that Barbados is the only Commonwealth Caribbean country that recognises the binding jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In a

landmark case by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2010, the Court ruled in that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was a violation of the American Convention on Human Rights. As Barbados recognises the jurisdiction of the IACHR, the retention of anti-LGBT laws, which can be argued to disproportionately affect LGBT people, means it is effectively in violation of its obligations under the American Convention.

In August 2013, Prime Minister Freundel Stuart, at the opening of the Anglican Church Province of the West Indies Provincial Congress, said “whether homosexual behaviour derived from nature or from nurture, it does not lie within our

competence to sit in seats of judgement and to condemn those who pursue that practice.”

Despite harsh laws, LGBTI people are active in pursuing rights. United Gays and Lesbians against AIDS Barbados (UGLAAB) are an organisation in Barbados formed for the gay and lesbian community to help support those who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, and to educate and build the self-esteem of LGBTI people in Barbados.

“As a Transgender woman living in Barbados, I always have this to say for myself: It’s interesting, being me. But it’s not always fun. »

- LGBT 101 session in Barbados, presented by the Rev. Tom Decker of Rochester, N.Y.



» Many of my friends and acquaintances don't always understand what I mean by what I'm saying, until they observe or hear about what I go through from day to day.

"In recent weeks, I have faced situations where my photo was taken (under the assumption that I was unaware of it) and posted on the internet, with captions and descriptions intending to 'expose' me as a biological male. On some of these posts, threats are made by persons, expressing intentions to shoot, burn, or run me over with a vehicle if I were ever seen again (sure enough, if a moving vehicle is near me, some persons do urge the driver to attempt to hit me with the vehicle. Fortunately to date, no such incident has taken place).

"As an activist for LGBT equality, with special focus on that of the Trans community, many would say that I'm facing a losing battle here in Barbados. But it is my determination to be seen and treated just as any other 'ordinary' member of society which keeps me going."

Alex D V Hoffman

Belize is the only Central American nation that outright prohibits male homosexual activity. The criminal code outlaws same-sex conduct with a punishment of 10 years imprisonment.

The country even denies entry into the country for "Any prostitute or homosexual or any person who may be living on or receiving or who may have been living on or receiving the proceeds of prostitution or homosexual behaviour".

While there isn't much reporting of incidents of discrimination and violence, LGBTI people continue to be affected by sexuality-based discrimination in this self-identified Christian country where many leaders are socially and politically aligned to the Church.

LGBTI people from the United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM) have started a legal challenge to the country's colonial era anti-buggery laws on constitutional grounds. In May 2013, the Belizean judiciary started hearing a case where it will be asked to weigh up whether or not laws that penalise homosexuality in the country are constitutional.

However the Belize Council of Churches and Evangelical Association of Churches, along with the Belizean Government, argue that the elimination of Section 53, which outlaws “carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any person or animal”, would spur further laws advocating gay rights. No major political parties have supported the decriminalisation. The last hearing in the case was in May 2013 and a decision on the matter is expected later in 2014.

Also in 2013, the Belizean government launched a National Gender Policy to promote the empowerment of all people, particularly women and girls. However, religious denominations have begun campaigning that the language is “ambiguous and may be interpreted as giving rights to homosexuals” and organised an ‘Orange walk’ tour of the country to promote the message that persons who are LGBT should not enjoy the same rights as heterosexual men and women.

- Campaigners against the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Belize

“I have lost two teeth, had my family property invaded and car damaged by two mask men... I have had stones thrown at me, experienced simulated gun shots, insults and physical harm on public transportation, threats that speak to, ‘Caleb You have no right to breathe!’”

Caleb Orozco



LGBTI people in Canada enjoy some of the most progressive laws in the Americas and the world.

Because of this, Canada is currently one of the main countries that LGBTI people from around the world go to when seeking asylum because of the discrimination they face in their own countries.

Homosexuality was decriminalised in Canada in 1969, when remaining British colonial anti-gay laws were repealed. Eight years later in 1977, Québec became the first jurisdiction in Canada to amend the province's Charter of Human Rights to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination. Today, sexual orientation is explicitly mentioned as a ground of prohibited discrimination in the human rights acts of all jurisdictions in Canada. In July 2005, Canada became the first Country in the Commonwealth, and fourth country in the world, to legalise same-sex marriages nationwide.

Internationally, Canada is one of the most prominent and credible voices advocating for

the fair treatment of, and an end to stigma and discrimination faced by, LGBTI people across the world. Foreign Minister John Baird has consistently denounced the callous treatment of LGBTI people and has contended that "The rights of gays and lesbians are tremendously important. It is completely unacceptable that homosexuality continues to be criminalised in a majority of Commonwealth countries."

Trans people and allies are currently campaigning for Bill C-279, which has seen a number of setbacks in four attempts and eight years of trying to pass the law. The bill would explicitly add gender identity and expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Additional provisions were added in 2009 to include gender identity and expression in the hate crimes provisions of the Criminal Code. The bill has currently stalled in the Canadian senate; civil society organisations across Canada are lobbying hard for its successful passing.

- Campaigning in support of C-279 at World Pride Toronto, Canada

One of the organisations fighting for Bill C-279 is Egale Canada Human Rights Trust (ECHRT). They are Canada's only national charity promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) human rights through research, education and community engagement. Egale's vision is of a Canada free of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and all other forms of discrimination so that every person can achieve their full potential, unencumbered by hatred and bias.

The Lambda Literary and Scholarship Foundation is a Canadian non-profit organisation with charitable status that is devoted to education

about the human rights of LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people in all their diversities. Their awards are open to all eligible recipients regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, racial or ethnic background, etc. So far, they have annual awards at nine universities across Canada from New Brunswick to British Columbia.

In June 2014 Toronto held the first World Pride event in North America. Over 2 million people took part in 10 days of events which included a Human Rights Conference, the first World Pride Trans Rights March, as well as a huge parade.



Dominica made world-wide headlines in May 2012 when two passengers were arrested aboard an international cruise liner for having gay sex on the balcony of a ship docked in a Dominican port.

The pair, from the United States, were charged under 'buggery' laws. The law in Dominica criminalises all forms of same-sex conduct under the Sexual Offences Act 1998. The Act imposes criminal sanctions for 'gross indecency' with sentences up to five years and for 'buggery' with sentences ranging from five to twenty-five years.

CHAP Dominica, an HIV organisation, has found that negative statements by key opinion leaders such as politicians have contributed to reinforcing negative attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. There are several allegations of harassment, bullying, home invasions and other types of abuse perpetrated against LGBTI people in Dominica. There are no laws to protect people

from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation.

In May 2013, Bishop Michael Daniel, President of the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches called upon Dominica's political leaders "to take a unified stand and oppose the LGBTI agenda to legislate their sinful behavior." The Prime Minister, Roosevelt Skerrit had previously said the laws criminalising same-sex intimacy will not be repealed because no "compelling" argument has been posited in that regard.

Minority Rights Dominica (MiRiDom), an LGBT rights advocacy group, has been lobbying the government to protect and promote the rights of LGBT people. MiRiDom has launched a campaign to decriminalise same-sex intimacy. Their campaign has been bolstered by a number of high-profile political figures coming out in support of decriminalisation. In 2011, Sir Brian Alleyne, Former Attorney General and former Chief Justice of the Eastern Caribbean

- Campaigners welcome the appointment of an openly gay US ambassador to the nation

Supreme Court, calling for changes to the law said “What a person does in the privacy of his home with another person is his business.” In July 2013, Willie Fevrier, outgoing head of the Dominica Planned Parenthood Association (DPPA) said that discrimination against LGBT people is “a major concern” and that people should be more tolerant.

“Being a lesbian in Dominica embodies one word – Invisible. To the average eye being a lesbian in the Commonwealth of Dominica is

just as easy as being a straight man. No real pressure from society. This is false.

“As a lesbian in one of the most rapidly growing homophobic countries in the Caribbean, I have learnt that I have no real rights as a member of the LGBTQI community, and barely that of a straight woman. I have been the victim of sexual harassment, discrimination and often the butt of a threatened man’s joke; with no law enforced for my protection. My sexuality and preference are not accepted in Dominica, but instead simply tolerated.” **Anonymous**





Grenada has a relatively vibrant LGBTI community despite the discrimination faced in Grenadian society. This is evidenced by a number of civil society groups that advocate on behalf of the community.

GrenCHAP is the Grenada chapter of the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Partnership (CHAP), a network of groups in small Caribbean countries working to promote human rights and health, with a focus on marginalised populations such as LGBT, sex workers, and persons living with and affected by HIV. Their objectives are to promote the health of key populations through education for prevention and the building of skills; to build support networks of key populations; to engage in public education to sensitise and humanise issues; and to advocate for policy and legal reform and to promote equality and universal access to health.

Male same-sex conduct is not legal in Grenada according to the Criminal Code, which views anal sex as an 'unnatural act' punishable with of up to ten years in prison. Female same-sex conduct is not specifically mentioned in the

law. Even though the anti-gay laws are rarely enforced, there have been incidents such as the May 2011 arrest of two adult men for engaging in consensual sexual activity.

"Marginalized populations start off at a stage of questioning and paranoia. Then there's this long journey where you go along until you eventually are comfortable with yourself and you can function as a 'normal' person. And I think if we can speed up that process (in Grenada) as much as possible so that people can start living their lives and be comfortable sooner than later, then that would have a big impact on peoples' lives. Ultimately, we want people to have a better life." **Nigel Mathlin**



- GrenCHAP staff and supporters at the opening of their new centre in St George, Grenada

Guyana is the only country on the mainland South American continent where male same-sex conduct is illegal. The Criminal Law (Offences) Act of Guyana prescribes punishment of imprisonment of 10 years or more.

Female same-sex conduct is not explicitly criminalised. In Guyana, LGBTI people are at risk of discrimination and violence. In April 2012, the government established a select committee to facilitate a national consultation around repealing the law. The Guyana Equality Forum, a collective of justice related organisations, has prepared a submission to the parliamentary committee in this regard. In 2000, a constitutional amendment prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was unanimously approved by the National Assembly of Guyana. However, some religious communities fiercely opposed the provision and successfully convinced then President Bharrat Jagdeo not to give his assent to the bill.

In 2012 three human rights organisations: Guyana RainBow Foundation (GuyBow), the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights

Commission (IGLHRC), and the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD), came together to publish an LBT-specific shadow report for submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The report 'Human Rights Violations of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (LBT) People in Guyana' said that despite the right to protection from discriminatory laws, stereotypes, and cultural attitudes for all women, "the Government of Guyana has taken no steps to repeal laws that impact LBT persons or to modify cultural attitudes that lead to climates of fear, harassment, and discrimination. Many LBT people experience discrimination by the police and law enforcement officials. Discriminatory laws against cross-dressing have led to detentions and fines for transgender women. Because of cultural attitudes against LBT people, there have been documented incidences of police intimidation, detention, and the failure to investigate homophobic assaults."

SASOD has been active in campaigning for a better Guyana for LGBTI people and »

» in February 2010 filed a lawsuit contesting Guyanese laws against 'cross dressing'. In September 2013, Chief Justice Ian Chang ruled that men can crossdress as long as it is not for an "improper purpose". Kemraj Persaud, program coordinator of SASOD, provided advice concerning poverty of LGBT people during the annual gathering of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) which took place in Washington in October 2013. The World Bank took evidence on what it could do to alleviate poverty among millions of LGBT people around the world.

In January 2014, on the first anniversary of the murder of 19-year old Wesley "Tiffany" Holder,

LGBTI people came together to organise a 'March for Justice' against the slow police investigations of killings of LGBTI people in the country.

"I have reached a point in my life where I could care less of what people think. Today, I am living my best life ever and I owe it to myself as well as society out there to come clean as it were." **Leon Suseran**



SASOD at 10

Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination documentary.

▶ http://youtu.be/THaDWjT_qeg



- LGBTI Campaigners in Guyana calling for decriminalisation

**Male same-sex conduct is illegal in Jamaica and punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment.
Female same-sex conduct is not criminalised.**

Sexuality-based discrimination continues to be commonplace and impacts on LGBTI people in a number of ways, including their right to work, education, health, life, and equality before the law, among others. The law does not protect people from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity and many LGBTI Jamaicans have been forced to seek asylum abroad as a consequence of the discrimination and violence they face.

In April 2011, the Jamaican government passed the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedom but ignored calls to include sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds for non-discrimination. Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller stated during her 2011 general election campaign that LGBTI people should not be discriminated against and that she intended to facilitate a conscience vote in parliament on the matter, however in recent comments she stated that decriminalisation

of LGBTI people 'was not a priority' for her government.

J-FLAG, the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-sexuals and Gays, is an LGBT rights organisation in Jamaica, founded in 1998, and works for the human rights of LGBT people in Jamaica and the world. To raise awareness within, and increase visibility of, the LGBT community, J-FLAG has developed some social media campaigns that provide LGBT persons and allies with opportunities to share their personal stories with the public. It is part of the Caribbean Forum for Liberation and Acceptance of Genders and Sexualities (CariFLAGS).

According to J-FLAG, "Jamaica is a very classist society, and this is manifested in the way we treat members of the LGBT population. Stigma, discrimination, violence, and crime affect all minority and vulnerable populations disproportionately when compared with the general population. LGBT people experience several layers of homophobia or homonegative attitudes. We experience this in homes, schools, churches, at healthcare facilities, at the »

» workplace, in policy, in law, and in our communities. Crime and violence in particular primarily affect young poor males more than the rest of the LGBT population. This is not unique to the community, as it represents the trend in national crime statistics.”

In January 2013, J-FLAG noted that despite the continued discrimination and violence perpetrated against LGBTI people, there was some progress in Jamaica. A 2012 survey commissioned by J-FLAG found that one in five Jamaicans respect LGBTI people and one in five would support a Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms that includes sexual orientation as a ground for non-discrimination. Also, one-third of the population believes the government is not doing enough to protect LGBTI people from violence and discrimination. Among these were what it described as an “unprecedented” move by the University of Technology to address anti-gay attitudes and violence (in response to the savage beating of a male student allegedly found in a compromising position with another male in November 2012); improved relations with the

Jamaica Constabulary Force; and calls by the Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson for the buggery law to be amended.

Sadly, anti-LGBTI violence in the country remains high. In July 2013, 16 year-old Dwayne Jones who attended a party as female was murdered by a mob in St James after being identified by another patron as trans. After the murder of a gay activist in Montego Bay, former Prime Minister PJ Patterson called for more tolerance for homosexuals in Jamaica.

Supplementary to J-FLAG, in January 2013 Quality of Citizenship Jamaica (QCJ) was formed. QCJ came out of the need for an organisation specifically working on issues surrounding lesbian, bisexual and other women who have sex with women. Quality of Citizenship Jamaica is primarily a research and education organisation.

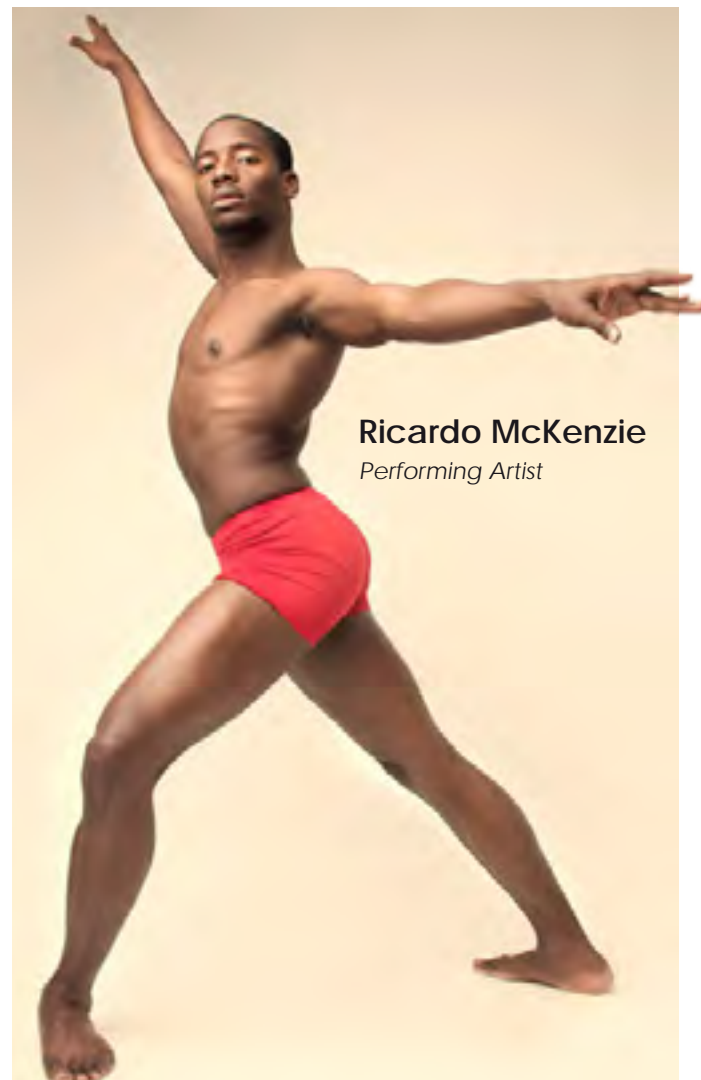
“I am free and happy now, accepted by my family (including my dad who is a Minister of Religion) and friends but it was not always

the case. In my earlier years I was verbally assaulted because I was perceived to be a lesbian. I was asked by the then Warden for Taylor Hall, UWI (University of West Indies), to vacate the hall mid- semester because it was reported to him that I was engaging in illegal activities, that is, sexually engaging a woman. I resisted the move but was not awarded a space on Hall for the following academic year.

“Thankfully, I no longer suffer this degree of victimisation but everyday I live with the fear of being harmed on the basis of my sexual orientation. I spend my days advocating for a more rights-based approach to development, one in which Jamaica respects the right of all persons. I am a proud Jamaican lesbian and I applaud the incremental progress being made in Jamaica as I believe it has directly impacted my survival as a lesbian.” **Latoya Nugent**



Kandi's Story in Kingston, Jamaica
Interview with Kandi in Kingston, Jamaica. Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights and J-FLAG. 2014
<http://vimeo.com/89556756>



Ricardo McKenzie
Performing Artist

- Jflag campaign against homophobia in Jamaica #ichooselove

The United and Strong (U&S) LGBTI rights organisation was founded in 2001. It has been active at a national and international level, campaigning for human rights, raising consciousness and lobbying the government for law changes.

Their mission is “to provide an enabling environment for the advancement of human rights for the LGBTI community in Saint Lucia.”

In May 2012, United & Strong organised a demonstration at the Office of the Prime Minister and Minister of Education around the International Day Against Homophobia and

Transphobia (IDAHOT). It was the first of its kind undertaken by U&S members and human rights supporters, and highlighted to St. Lucia that the LGBTI community will not remain unseen, nor unheard. U&S have also, in partnership with AIDS Free World and CariFLAGS, produced human rights violation documentation training for human rights defenders in the Eastern Caribbean. In August 2013, United & Strong partnered with AIDS Free World, to host an LGBTI sensitivity training for police officers.

The work of U&S remains so required in St Lucia because of the country’s laws which criminalise LGBTI people. According to the



- United and Strong members say its #timetoact on sexual violence

Criminal Code, consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal under indecency statutes, and some same-sex sexual activity between men is also illegal under anal intercourse laws. Indecency statutes carry a maximum penalty of five years, and anal intercourse carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. LGBTI people in St Lucia enjoy varying levels of tolerance; discrimination remains commonplace.

Christian evangelical groups continue to lead anti-gay movements to block efforts by human rights defenders to advance the rights of LGBTI people in St Lucia. In July 2013, the Caribbean Centre for Family and Human Rights (CARIFAM) published a letter in The Voice, the national newspaper of St Lucia, outlining ten reasons why the government should not decriminalise buggery.

Working against this message is the AIDS Action Foundation (AAD), which works with minority groups such as men who have sex with men to advocate for their basic right to “live and love as they want” without fear of legal or social retribution or incarceration

since homosexuality is a criminal offence in the country.

“Coming out as a lesbian in Saint Lucia was definitely an overwhelming experience as I did not know what to expect from my family, friends, acquaintances, co-workers and even the everyday man on the street who just randomly says hi as I would walk around the busy streets of Castries. For me it was definitely an emotional roller coaster especially having to break the news to my grandparents who raised me in a Christian home where a lesbian lifestyle was not part of the norms, tradition and culture in Saint Lucia society. However, I managed to break the silence to my friends and family. While some were accepting others were not as supportive. Surprisingly my mom accepted me and like she told me “once you’re happy, I am happy” and I have always kept this with me as my strength.” **Jessica St Rose**



Speak up! Speak out! Speak love!

United and Strong Inc St. Lucia

▶ <http://youtu.be/vrDil1uFVKw>

LGBTI people in St. Kitts & Nevis continue to experience discrimination and acts of violence based on their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity. There are no laws that prohibit discrimination against a person on the basis of sexual orientation and the act of buggery remains illegal. This carries penalties of up to 10 years in prison. Over the last 5 years there have been a few charges of buggery against men. Female same-sex activity is not explicitly criminalised.

In August 2013, Prime Minister Dr. Denzil Douglas, who has lead responsibility for health within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) cabinet, gave his support to a debate in parliament regarding the buggery law. He argued that, "As a country, we have been called upon to look at some of the existing laws that we have on our law books. The buggery law for example, we believe that the time has come for debate to take place in our country with regard to whether these laws, which continue to perpetuate discrimination and stigmatisation against certain people."

Societal attitudes against LGBTI people impede the operation and free association of LGBTI

organisations and the openness of LGBTI people in the country.

"In a word life as a gay man in St.Kitts is complicated. You need to have real strength of character in order to live a happy life here. There are no 'meeting spots' such as clubs or bars where you can meet like-minded men. So it's a constant guessing game if you see someone you're attracted to. And while the homophobia here isn't as blatant as other islands, it still exists. It's really hard to summarize so much hate and ignorance in such a small space. The life of a gay Kittitian (male) is one that needs the mental strength of a thousand Vietnam soldiers. Being ambushed verbally and sometimes physically by "Christ following" men and women who are under the impression that somewhere along the line of choosing what shirt we'd wear to work today, we also chose to be aroused by the simple features of a male. Plain and simple, the life of a gay man let alone a young man, who is already struggling to find his identity in the world, is a tough road to walk, but it's a road we have to take." **Junior**

Same-sex relationships, either between men or women, are considered illegal. Although rarely enforced, indecency statutes carry a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment, and anal intercourse carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in imprisonment.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines rejected the recommendation of the 2008 UN Human Rights Committee to repeal section 146 of the Criminal Code that criminalises sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex.

Although no statistics are available, anecdotal evidence suggests there is social discrimination against LGBTI people in the deeply conservative society. An example occurred recently when the President of the Scouts Association of St Vincent and the Grenadines, Morrison Baisden, said gay and lesbian scout leaders will not be tolerated in the organisation.

Baisden, speaking to reporters on plans by the local scouting association to celebrate its 100th anniversary later this year, said, like the World Scout Movement, the local

body has been affected by “the spectre of homosexuality”.

Unlike many other islands in the region, St. Vincent and the Grenadines does not have an LGBTI organisation that can act as a reference point where advocacy and/or social services are concerned. This is done indirectly and through HIV organisations, such as the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Alliance, which attempt to bridge the gap between HIV prevention and social support services for at-risk groups such as MSMs and sex workers.

“As a gay young Caribbean citizen, I have experienced both sides of the coin. I have been bullied especially in high school because of my perceived sexuality as well as been subject to physical attacks. I was beaten in fights and was even once stoned.

“There is also the acceptance which I have received in parts of my society. I have found that the more educated you become and the more you climb the social ladder »

» especially in a small society as St. Vincent and the Grenadines that you become more accepted. After returning from my studies at university, more persons look at you now as an upstanding citizen with something to contribute rather than a deviant. There is still a struggle for total acceptance of my lifestyle and the understanding that LGBT rights are human rights rather than a fight for choice especially in a close-minded society as mine.” **Anonymous**

Neither male nor female same-sex relationships are legal in the country and are punishable by up to 25 years imprisonment. However the laws criminalising LGBTI people are rarely enforced except when paired with more serious offences such as rape. Trinidad and Tobago’s immigration laws also bar the entry of homosexual people into the country; again the legislation is not enforced.

In 2011, the Data Protection Act became the first pro-LGBTI legislation in the country. The Act sought to “ensure that protection is afforded to an individual’s right to privacy and the right to maintain sensitive personal information as private and personal”. The legislation is significant as the law provides heightened protections for “sensitive personal information”, which is defined to include one’s “sexual orientation or sexual life”.

In August 2012, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar sent a letter to the Kaleidoscope Trust, in which said she wanted to “put an end to all discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation” in the country. Mrs Persad-Bissessar said the stigmatisation of LGBTI people had to

be “addressed on the grounds of human rights and dignity to which every individual is entitled under international law.”

The LGBTI community is centred in the capital city of Port-of-Spain. The main advocacy groups opposing anti-LGBTI prejudice are the Coalition Advocating for Inclusion of Sexual Orientation (CAISO) and the Trinidad & Tobago FreePride Foundation Project (FreePride). CAISO was founded in 2009 as a public forum in order to raise awareness among lay people and elected officials about the needs of LGBT people and the issues they face. In 2013 a survey commissioned by CAISO revealed that a little over half of the population is tolerant towards LGBT people.

Another vital group is the Women’s Caucus. It is not a political organisation; rather, it provides gay women with a forum to chat and express themselves beyond the party scene. It was formed to unify these women throughout Trinidad, and aims to help women of the LGBT community to know that they are not alone in their struggles. The Women’s Caucus also hosts

social gatherings, using proceeds to aid the needy within the community.

Maurice Tomlinson, a gay rights activist and lawyer from Jamaica who is active across the Caribbean, is contesting the section of anti-gay laws which prohibit homosexuals from entering Trinidad and Tobago. On 8th May 2014 the Caribbean Court of Justice granted special leave, saying that it was arguable that the mere existence of laws such as these could constitute a violation of a person’s rights under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (which established the Caribbean Community). The governments of Trinidad and Tobago, and Belize, the only two countries in the Western hemisphere which continue to prohibit the entry of gay people, had argued that the laws were not enforced in practice. The case will now proceed to a full hearing.

In June 2014, LGBT youth leaders from across the Caribbean united in Trinidad to push for lingering anti-gay laws to be repealed. At a ‘Generation Change’ event, representatives from Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St Lucia, Belize and Trinidad and Tobago came »

- » together to discuss the problems they face on a day-to-day basis as a result of homophobic laws, which are often colonial-era remnants.

“It was 1997, she was Ellen, I was eleven, and I realized I was not alone. I had never heard the word lesbian until then and instantly I knew what it meant. I was young but I wasn’t

stupid and I knew I was ‘different’, I liked girls the way I perceived that my mom liked boys. It would take seven years for me to tell my mother, and when I did, I came out as bi. I did this as a way to ease her into the idea, while trying to convince myself that there was still a little ‘normal’ in me. Fact is I was as normal as anyone could be, and I was bi.”

Candace Moses

- Coalition Advocating for Inclusion of Sexual Orientation (CAISO) members campaigning during IDAHOT



EUROPE

EUROPE HAS A SMALLER NUMBER OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES THAN THE OTHER four regions, housing Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom. LGBTI people enjoy differing rights and opportunities in each of these three nations, and since January 2014 none are criminalised in law. All three countries are making progress step by step on LGBTI equality and human rights.

Malta will host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in 2015, and people there are working to put LGBTI human rights high on the agenda. CHOGM is the biennial summit meeting of the heads of government from all Commonwealth nations, and will be hosted by the Maltese President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca.



In June 2014, thousands of people took part in Cyprus' first gay pride in Nicosia to press for equal rights for all Cypriots and for progress on a bill for civil partnership.

The parade, held under the theme "Same Love – Equal Rights" was the climax of two weeks of events that included film screenings, theatre performances, music, dance and workshops. The festival was organised by Accept LGBT Cyprus and supported by Nicosia Municipality, the offices of the European Commission and European Parliament in Nicosia, several political parties and the Ambassadorial staff from Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK and USA.

Accept, the organiser of the first pride festival, is an organisation that works for protection, assertion and promotion of the rights and interests of LGBT people and to combat prejudice, stereotypes, stigma and social exclusion. They raise awareness and inform the community, as well as the general public, organised or non-organised institutions and society in general, on matters of sexuality,

identity gender, sexual orientation and sexual health. The organisation was founded in October 2009.

Some in Cyprus have said little has changed for LGBT Cypriots since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1998 after a case, *Modinos v. Cyprus*, in the European Court of Human Rights. The age of consent was made equal at 17 in 2002. In 2013, the penal code was amended to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics. It now states that: "A person who publicly and in a threatening manner intentionally encourages or incites either verbally or with written texts or illustrations or any other way to violence or hatred directed against a person or group defined on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, is guilty of an offence."

There have been discussions in the Cypriot Parliament about new civil partnership legislation. A draft bill was accepted by the government in February 2013. Following elections, the new President Nicos Anastasiades has been reported as supporting the measure and some

MPs hope that a bill will be introduced in the coming months. The influence of the Orthodox Church remains strong in Cyprus and there is little evidence that social attitudes are becoming significantly more accepting.

In the northern part of Cyprus discrimination protection was brought in by a law change in the Criminal Code along with a vote for the legalisation of same-sex conduct in January 2014, the last area in Europe to do so. Queer Cyprus Association was originally established in 2007 as Initiative Against Homophobia (HOKI). They were the first LGBTQ organisation in Cyprus north established to campaign against the laws which criminalise same-sex activity.

Shortbus Movement is a team of dedicated volunteer individuals who believe that all people are equal, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, sex or any other status. The group's centre is located in the northern part of Cyprus and they aim to support all the individual or organisational activities of LGBTI people of the Turkish community of Cyprus.

“Affection between men is something that most Cypriots have never seen, and even holding hands in public will cause people to stare in amazement, even if you give them the ‘what are you looking at?’” **Anonymous**



- Thousands took part in the first Cyprus Pride event on June 1st 2014

LGBTI people in Malta have been celebrating a new civil unions law after many years of campaigning. First introduced in September 2013 the law grants same-sex couples in civil unions the same rights, responsibilities, and obligations as marriage, including the right of joint adoption.

The Maltese Parliament gave final approval to the legislation on 14 April 2014 by a vote of 37 in favour and 30 abstentions. President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca signed it into law on 16 April 2014 with the first civil union taking place on the 13 June 2014. The move was supported by a majority of the Maltese people.

Colonial era sodomy laws were repealed in Malta in 1973, and in 2012, amendments to the Criminal Code were passed to include sexual orientation and gender identity under hate crime provisions.

Legal gender recognition for transgender people is covered by two pieces of legislation. Currently however, only

transgender people who have undergone irreversible gender reassignment surgery may change their gender marker in official documentation such as identity cards, birth certificates and passports. Much more progressive gender recognition legislation, which is based on self-determination and doesn't require any diagnosis or medical treatment, is currently making its way through parliament.

After a seven year legal battle, there was a major victory for the advancement of the rights of trans people when in April 2013, Joanne Cassar, a transsexual woman won the right to marry her male partner. In April 2014 Malta broke new ground by naming gender identity as a protected characteristic in its constitution, becoming the first European country to do so.

The main LGBTI organisation in Malta is the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM) which was set up in June 2001. It is run by a committee of volunteers and it strives to achieve full equality for LGBT people in

Maltese society. Their campaigning on the civil unions law was pivotal to its passing by the Parliament. The organisation also runs the Rainbow Support Service, providing support to individuals, their families and friends who are encountering difficulties relating to their sexuality or same sex-relationships.

We Are, the University of Malta LGBT Society, takes a 3 pronged approach to improve the lives of LGBT people at a national level. First of all, they focus on awareness raising and the delivery of workshops to various groups. Secondly, they volunteer at the Rainbow Support Service, which provides a weekly drop-in for LGBT youth. Supporting these types of services is important as they provide the spaces for LGBT youth to be themselves without fear. Finally, they also work on lobbying and representation.

- We Are IDAHOT campaign photo
- Celebrations as Malta passes civil unions law



The European LGBTI organisation ILGA-Europe rates the UK as having the best LGBTI equality laws in Europe. However, until quite late in the 20th century, sex between men was a crime in the UK, punishable with prison. Shamefully, the UK exported that law around the world, by imposing it on many other countries during the colonial era. It is the original source of most of the anti-gay laws around the Commonwealth today.

Within the UK, sex between men was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967, in Scotland in 1981 and in Northern Ireland in 1982. Sex between women was never a specific crime.

In 1988 a law, known as “section 28”, was introduced for England, Wales and Scotland, which banned the “promotion of homosexuality” by public bodies including education authorities. That law was highly controversial, and sparked a new wave of equality campaigns in the UK. The law was abolished in Scotland in 2000 and in England and Wales in 2003.

Since 2000, a wide range of legislation has been passed that improves sexual orientation

equality, including equalising the age of consent, allowing same-sex couples to adopt jointly and to access fertility treatment, civil partnership, and anti-discrimination and anti-hate crime laws. Most recently, same-sex marriage was introduced in England and Wales in 2014, and in Scotland it will be available from the end of 2014. Same-sex marriage is not available in Northern Ireland however.

The picture for trans and intersex people is not quite so good. There is anti-discrimination law, but it refers to gender reassignment rather than gender identity or expression and does not cover intersex people. The anti-hate crime law is better, explicitly including intersex people in Scotland and referring to transgender people rather than gender reassignment. Some trans people can change their legal gender, but they need a psychiatric diagnosis to do that. There is no provision for legal gender recognition for intersex people or for the recognition of non-binary gender identities.

There are a number of LGBTI groups working across the UK. The largest national sexual

orientation campaign group is Stonewall, with campaigns including workplace equality, equality in schools, better public attitudes, and work with international partners. Press for Change and GIRES are national trans equality organisations.

In Scotland, the national organisations include the Equality Network including the Scottish Transgender Alliance, LGBT Youth Scotland, and LEAP Sports. The Equality Network's current campaigns include equal legal recognition for all trans and intersex people, equality for intersectional people such as minority ethnic and disabled LGBTI people, and better public attitudes towards LGBTI people. The Equality Network is also working around the Commonwealth Games 2014, including producing this exhibition and an international conference.

LGBT Youth Scotland works to empower LGBT young people and the wider LGBT community, so that they are embraced as full members of the Scottish family at home, school and in every community. LEAP Sports works to break down barriers that discourage LGBT people from participating in sport, and

are the organisers of Pride House during the Commonwealth Games 2014.

In Northern Ireland, The Rainbow Project is the largest organisation, and works to improve the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of LGBT people, as well as operating two centres: one in Belfast and the other in Foyle.



It's Time

Equality Network Equal Marriage Campaign.

▶ http://youtu.be/_p6FLHRYYE



- Campaigners outside the Scottish Parliament urging the passing of Equal Marriage in Scotland

PACIFIC

ELEVEN NATIONS IN THE PACIFIC REGION ARE MEMBERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH, THE largest being Australia with over 7.6million km² and the smallest, Nauru at just 21 km². Commonwealth countries in the Pacific have the lowest combined population than each of the other four regions, at just under 37 million.

LGBTI people face a mixed picture of rights and criminalisation across differing parts of the Pacific, from same-sex marriage and the availability of gender-neutral birth certificates in some member countries to possible imprisonment and even lashes in others. Across the Pacific, the evidence suggests that where criminalisation laws are in place, prosecutions are non-existent or rare.

Australia has been referred to as one of the most LGBTI-friendly countries in the world, with recent polls indicating that a majority of Australians support same-sex marriage, as well as progress at state and national levels on LGBTI human rights and equality issues, in particular on intersex and trans issues.

Australian Government guidelines state that individuals should be able to change their sex on all government records, although processes for doing so vary amongst states and territories. In March 2014, the Australian Capital Territory government passed a progressive law allowing transgender people to change the sex on their birth certificates. Prior to the act, a birth certificate could only be changed if someone had undergone sexual reassignment surgery.

But the new laws will allow someone to have their gender recognised as male, female or unspecified, without surgery or diagnosis. Instead, a doctor or psychologist must certify that they have either received “appropriate clinical treatment for the alteration of the person’s sex” – which is deliberately not

defined, leaving it to the doctor or psychologist to decide on what is appropriate – or that they are an intersex person.

Campaigning for progressive laws are OII Australia, which is the Australian affiliate of Organisation Intersex International (OII), a global network of intersex organisations. They are an independent support, education and policy development organisation, by and for intersex people, whose work focuses on human rights, bodily autonomy and self-determination, and on evidence-based, patient-centred healthcare.

Australia decriminalised homosexuality in stages, at a state and territory level. Australian Capital Territory became the first to decriminalise in 1973 and Tasmania the last in 1997, 102 years after British era colonial laws whereby the death penalty for convicted sodomites was reduced to life imprisonment.

On 25 June 2013, the Australian Federal Parliament passed the Sex Discrimination Amendment Bill 2013 with overwhelming »

- » support in both houses, and it became law in three days. The Act provides citizens with Federal protection from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. Same-sex couples are now also protected from discrimination under the definition of marital or relationship status.

There are many organisations working on LGBTI rights in Australia, from local groups to national level organisations. An example is the Gender Centre in New South Wales (NSW), which is committed to developing and providing services and activities which enhance the ability of the transgender and gender diverse community to make informed choices. They have been educating the public and service providers about the needs of the trans community for the past 30 years.

In Victoria, Bisexual Alliance Victoria Inc. is a non-profit volunteer-run organisation dedicated to promoting the acceptance of bisexuals in LGBTI and mainstream society, providing a fun, safe space where bi people can meet, make friends, and talk about their experiences, and

inform the bisexual community about relevant news and opportunities for activism. They have been running monthly discussion and support groups under various banners since 1994. Also in Victoria, the Zoe Belle Gender Centre (ZBGC) supports and improves the health and wellbeing of Victoria's sex and gender diverse population.

"When I was born doctors weren't sure if I was a boy or a girl. After many medical tests they determined I was born biologically part male and part female. The decision was made that I was to be raised as a girl, have my testes removed, and made to look like a girl. I was named Antoinette. I had many, many medical examinations and surgeries as a young person. When I grew up I did not feel I was being honest by living as a woman. I started taking male hormones, changed my name to Anthony and started living as a man. Relationships were very difficult. After a few years I began to accept the way I was born. I now openly live as an intersex person and celebrate being both male and female.

"I still live in the community where I grew up as a girl. Australia sometimes has a reputation for a 'macho' culture so I was very proud to be elected Mayor two years ago. Being open about the way that I was born and the way I feel has been very well accepted by my community. I wish more people knew about

intersex so that other people like me felt more comfortable about being open about the way they were born." **Tony Briffa**



It's Time

Marriage Equality in Australia.

 http://youtu.be/_TBd-UCwVAY



- The Australian High Court ruled that same-sex marriages held in Canberra will be annulled



LGBTI people have seen significant progress in their legal rights since 1997 when Fiji became the second country in the world to explicitly protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation in its constitution; this was three years before the legalisation of homosexuality in 2010. A new constitution, which took effect in September 2013, includes provisions banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Despite this progress there is still much to be done to achieve human rights and equality for LGBTI Fijians. Society is still fairly conservative and there have been instances where the police have harassed LGBTI people, notably banning a 2012 Fijian celebration on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). Trans people in Fiji continue to face harassment, discrimination, humiliation, condemnation and degradation based on their gender identity and expression. Those in the trans community who are ostracised and discriminated against are prohibited access to basic rights for services such as health and medical care, education,

public transport, employment opportunities and legal justice.

In April 2013, to mark IDAHOT, a submission was made by the Amithi Fiji Project to the Attorney General's Office as part of a consultation on the new Draft Fiji Constitution. The submission called for the legal recognition of Trans People in Fiji. This was done in the hopes of securing in the new Draft Constitution the creation of a safe, secure and equal Fiji for all Fijians based on the principles of a common and equal citizenry, social justice and the elimination of discrimination. There have also been calls for same-sex marriage, although the prime minister recently ruled out including this in the constitution.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) are a group that defends the rights of women in the country, and also represent the LGBTI communities. Drodrolagi Movement (DroMo) is a community based organisation that since 2010 has organised week-long activities to advocate for LGBT rights and equality. The organisation has been holding rainbow

‘chalking’ events and for IDAHOT 2014 helped organised a family fun day and a week long programme of events.

In December 2013, Fiji was the first ever Pacific island nation to host an LGBTI themed short film festival. The event was organised by the Drodrolagi Movement with support from the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, at the Fiji National University.

“I grew up with a very religious background so sexuality was not something we ever discussed at home. I realized I was a lesbian when I was 22 and soon became active in LGBT activism. Currently Fiji has no LGBT rights to speak of other than the non-discrimination clause. However the state is not ready to discuss anything on LGBT. The people’s draft constitution was a really good document as it protected everyone’s rights and would have allowed for same sex marriage if passed. The 2013 constitution however has many limitations, so now we have to be very careful and strategic about how we do our work. We could

find ourselves in an incriminating situation as deemed fit by the government.

“Fijian society is homophobic and people are subjected to violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity on a daily basis. However younger people are somewhat tolerant and engaging on discussion about homosexuality. There is a lot that needs to be done for the LGBTIQ people in Fiji and groups and networks all over Fiji are doing their best to combat homophobia.” **Jasmine Kaur**



- Drodrolagi Movement members have organised IDAHOT and film events

Sodomy, regardless of sexual orientation, and acts of “gross indecency between males” are illegal under sections 153, 154 and 155 of the penal code with punishments of up to 14 years imprisonment. However, the US State Department 2012 Country Report on Kiribati notes that there was no evidence of any prosecutions, nor were there reports of societal discrimination or violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity or against any person with HIV/AIDS.

We were unable to find evidence of any LGBTI organisations or LGBTI events in the country and there appears to be no current moves to reform the Kiribati legal code, however, one organisation working in Kiribati, the Peace Corps, does say there are both lesbians and gay men in Kiribati. Gay men tend to be treated as women in Kiribati culture and can be seen performing tasks normally associated with female Kiribatians. While the I-Kiribati (the Micronesian inhabitants of Kiribati) are understood to be tolerant where race is concerned, homosexuality is not well understood. The I-Kiribati traditionally see gay or transgender men as a third sex, this is a consequence of Polynesian influence from Tongan and Samoan invasions over history.

Formerly a German colony, Nauru was passed to Australia after the First World War and adopted the Queensland legal code, which contained anti-sodomy laws, in 1921. Officially, male same-sex conduct is illegal and can be punished by up to 14 years imprisonment and hard labour. In practice though, there have been no reported cases of these laws being used and the government has stated it will repeal them soon. Female same-sex conduct is not explicitly criminalised.

Nauru was signatory to the 2008 UN declaration in support of LGBT rights and was part of a “Joint statement on ending acts of violence and related human rights violations based on sexual orientation & gender identity” in 2011. Early in 2011, Matthew Batsiua, the Nauruan Minister for Health, Justice and Sports stated that the decriminalisation of “homosexual activity between consenting adults” was under active consideration, and later that year the Government of Nauru pledged to decriminalise same-sex acts. A forthcoming review of the Nauruan Criminal Code is expected to decriminalise consensual homosexual activity as part of a wider platform of reforms in the coming months.

New Zealand was the first and only country in the Pacific region, and the third Commonwealth country (after Canada and South Africa), to allow same-sex couples to marry. Same-sex marriage became legal at a national level on 19 August 2013 when the New Zealand House of Representatives passed the legislation by 77 votes to 44 in its third reading. The bill received Royal Assent on 19 April 2013.

Same-sex relationships, either male or female, are legal in New Zealand, and there is an equal age of consent. Furthermore, adoption by same-sex couples was also legalised in August 2013. The Human Rights Act 1993 included sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws in employment and in other areas. The Solicitor General later issued an opinion that the sex discrimination provisions of that act would also protect transgender people but gender identity is not yet specifically included. Hate crime laws, however, cover both sexual orientation and gender identity. It is possible to change legal gender on official documents, including passports on which a person can change their gender marker to F, M, or X. Birth certificates can also be changed to

reflect the gender a person lives as if they have undergone medical treatment.

The gay scene in New Zealand is reasonably small by international standards. However, Auckland has multiple LGBT venues and festivals, as well as being voted the 15th 'gayest' city in the world. Outside Auckland, larger cities and some towns host one or two LGBT venues. Many smaller centres have LGBT organisations and social networks that cater to their community.

There are a number of LGBTI organisations in the country, on a local or national level. GABA is the New Zealand's largest LGBT membership organisation offering a professional social network. GABA brings its members a selection of networking and social events.

The Gay Gardening Group Wellington (GGGW) is a small Facebook-mediated social group for queer lovers of plants and gardening, with occasional coffee-meets. It is based in Wellington, New Zealand. Over the decades, there have been various iterations »

- » of queer gardening groups in Wellington. The current GGGW leverages off, and is a continuation of the previous groups.

NZ Census: Call for a sexuality question is a Facebook-mediated group for people who support the idea of including a sexual orientation question in the New Zealand Census. It encourages people to think about the idea, and to make thoughtful submissions to Census organisers as to why there needs to be such a questions.

Agender New Zealand Incorporated is a Non-Profit Organisation, which has been supporting transgender people and their families throughout New Zealand since 1996.

GenderBridge was formed in April 2000, by a group of 15 transgender friends wanting to help others in similar situations as themselves. Their website offers a wealth of information and resources for transgender people at any stage of their transition.



Rainbow Youth is a charitable organisation providing support, information, advocacy and education for queer and trans young people (aged between 13 and 28), their friends and Whānau (extended family), and those who work with queer and trans youth. They aim to foster a safe, inclusive, accepting, diverse family environment.

In February 2014, the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) released a study of

LGBTI inclusion in the world's militaries and rated New Zealand's armed forces the most supportive. HCSS says it is the first ever global ranking of countries by inclusion of LGBTI service members in the armed forces.

"The most well-known love story in the Maori culture is of Tutanekai and Hinemoa. Over time, the story began to omit reference to Tiki, who was the very special male companion of Tutanekai who was also male. It is quite revealing how indigenous perceptions started to lean towards societal acceptance because of missionary 'intervention' (Christianity) and hegemony." **Rawa Karetai**



Lovely!!!

New Zealand Parliament passes Marriage Equality Bill with a song.

<http://youtu.be/KIVaPHdTWMk>

- Rainbow Youth celebrate pride in Auckland, Feb 2014



In 2011, in response to Nauru's and Palau's pledges to repeal antigay laws, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government informed the UN that it had no plans to follow suit. In 2012 Dame Carol Kidu, a prominent former PNG MP, unsuccessfully called for the government to repeal anti-LGBTI laws saying the laws forced some Papua New Guineans into living lives of secrecy.

Prime Minister Peter O'Neill replied that there were still strong feelings against homosexuality and the country was not ready "to accept such sexual openness". Also in 2012, the United States Department of State reported that LGBT persons were "vulnerable to societal stigmatisation".

Section 210 of the 1974 Criminal Code prohibits male same-sex sexual activity with those caught engaging in anal sex punished with 14 years imprisonment. Other male same-sex sexual activity is punished with up to three years imprisonment. These laws though have not been used in prosecutions in recent memory. Female same-sex activity is not criminalised.

In the Eastern highlands of Papua New Guinea, third-sex people are known as kwolu-aatmwol which translates to 'female thing changing into male'. Although it has been reported that in some instances kwolu-aatmwol may be killed at birth, most kwolu-aatmwol are accepted as such and are partially raised in the direction of masculinity. "Palopa" is the Pidgin term used for MSM and Transgender.

The Kapul Champions, are the country's first and only national organisation for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and Transgender people. Following 18 months of community consultations, Kapul Champions was established in May 2013 by local MSM/TG to represent the interests of MSM and TG across the country to better contribute to the national HIV response. They are a member of PSDN, a regional network of Pacific MSM and Transgender organisations.

In 2013, following the deal between Australia and PNG whereby all asylum seekers arriving by boat would be sent to PNG, concerns were raised about the fate of LGBTI asylum seekers



in a country where homosexuality is still illegal and LGBTI people suffer social exclusion.

“Growing up as a gay man in a typical PNG coastal village is different from in the highlands. People by the coast were more understanding (or maybe couldn’t be bothered) while up in the highlands it is a macho world and people bother about this a lot. Men who have sex with men or who are transgendered tend to be “hidden” by being married and hiding behind their wives, “laplaps” or their own beards. It is very complicated and disclosure of sexuality is not recommended. Most coastal villages are liberated and friendly, but they have more sensitisation.” **Don**



In 2011, in response to Nauru’s and Palau’s pledges to repeal antigay laws, the Samoan government informed the UN that it had no plans to follow suit. Samoan Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, has also gone on record to voice his opposition to equal marriage being legalised in Samoa.

Some male same-sex activity is illegal, according to the Crimes Ordinance of 1961, with a punishment of up to 5 years for anal sex between men and up to 7 years for homosexual prostitution. In 2013, the Samoan government updated the laws around sexual offences by repealing obsolete laws, in the Crimes Act 2013, which now defines “sexual connections” under section S49 (3) to include oral and anal sex, and by inference allows sexual contact between males, as long as its “consented to, and voluntarily”. However under S67, sodomy is still illegal even if it is consented to. »

- **Kapul Champions, Papua New Guinea’s first and only national organisation for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and Transgender people (TG) was launched in 2013**

- » Female same-sex relationships are not explicitly criminalised and notably, female ‘impersonation’ was decriminalised – a cause for great celebration amongst the Samoan fa’afafine community and human rights activists in the Pacific.

In common with other Polynesian nations, Samoa has a third-gender subculture called “fa’afafine” which translates to ‘be in the manner of’ or ‘to be like’ a female. Fa’afafine have been a part of the local Samoan culture long before the arrival of western influences. The practice and visibility of fa’afafine means that Samoan society is traditionally tolerant of trans people and they can be found in all areas of public life. In recent years some churches have had a notable influence on politics and teachings from the bible are often used to condemn individuals who identify as fa’afafine.

The Samoa Fa’afafine Association works with organisations such as the Samoa AIDS Foundation, Samoa Family Health, to promote the rights & interests of fa’afafines and faafatamas, a woman who identifies as a lesbian, in Samoa.

“Fa’afafine for me is the definition more of our spirit and essence than our physical entity. The fact that it is housed in a body of a male is just a happy coincidence, God logic, freaks of nature, call it what you like. When we define who we are as individuals in traditional Samoan society, we don’t really care about boxes and our femininity. What gender to tick. What’s male and what’s female. We live in the gray area in between. The nether regions of gender. Fa’afafine is a label, attached by western society to make us more easily explained to the world. More palatable. We believe it is not a validation of who we are anymore. We have gone beyond that definition of to be in the manner of woman or be like woman. We have gone from being the parodies of females and known as the fa’afafine of Samoa, back to being caring individuals, members of a family, of a community, of a village, of a church and a district. We have reasserted our identities as Samoan citizens. Along this journey has not been easy. But each small step we have taken, is a sign of our collective belief in a better world for us, for our Samoa.” **Tuisina Ymania Brown**

Neither same-sex relationships between men nor between women are legal, according to the Penal Code (Revised Edition 1996), and the consequences of practising them can imply penalties of up to 14 years in prison. There are, however, no reports of these laws being used to prosecute LGBTI people in recent years.

In 2008, the Solomon Islands Law Reform Commission proposed decriminalisation of

gay and lesbian acts but this was met with fierce public opposition and no reform was brought forward. In 2011, in response to Nauru's and Palau's pledges to repeal anti-gay laws, the Solomon Islands government informed the UN that it had no plans to follow suit.

We were unable to find information on LGBTI organisations or events in the Solomon Islands.



- Samoa Fa'afafine Association members

Like other Polynesian societies, Tonga has a widely accepted third gender subculture. A fakaleiti (or leiti) is a Tongan male who behaves in a relatively 'effeminate' manner. Although Leitis would not necessarily identify with western concepts of gay, lesbian or trans identities, they do have organisations that campaign on recognisably LGBTI issues.

Male same-sex activity is not legal in the only remaining monarchy in the Pacific, and can be punishable by a maximum penalty of up to 10 years or in certain circumstances whipping can also be used. It appears that there have been no prosecutions under these laws in recent years. Female same-sex activity is not mentioned in law.

The Tonga Leitis Association (TLA) has been active in advocating for a broad range of sexual orientation and gender identity rights. The organisation defines Leiti as an inclusive term that covers the broad range of men who have sex with men (MSM), trans people, gay and bisexual men. The TLA was formed in 1992 as the

HIV epidemic developed globally, and the vulnerability of MSM to HIV, became clear. The TLA has become a major part of the HIV response in Tonga. The Association is currently campaigning for legal recognition for Leitis and their inclusion in all national human rights commissions.

For the last 21 years they have held an annual beauty pageant, the Miss Galaxy Beauty Pageant, which has in effect become a "Pride" event for the Pacific region. The TLA receives royal patronage and has been active in campaigning in the mainstream community as advocates who also promote HIV/AIDS awareness to young people, families and Tonga's LGBTI communities.

The TLA are members of the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (PSDN), a network representing the interests of men who have sex with men (MSM) in the Pacific region since 2007. The PSDN chairperson Ms Joey (Joleen) Sosaia Mataele is also Co-Founder of the Tonga Leiti Association.



“As a Leiti in Tonga I have had to battle against a belief that my behaviour situates me outside the ‘normal’ ‘Anga FakaTonga’ (Tongan ways). In the past I had been called a “child of the devil” who was at-risk, vulnerable, stigmatized and lacking agency.

“My Leiti status has been equated with having a ‘lack of hope and mobility’ so I was seen as being on a pathway that leads to ‘poverty’ and isolation from normative model and space in Tongan society. But through the TLA we are challenging that prejudiced view with some success.” **Ms Joey (Joleen) Sosaia Mataele**

- The Tonga Leiti Association (TLA), est 1992



In a hangover from British colonial rule, same-sex acts and acts of “gross indecency between males” are illegal in Tuvalu according to the Penal Code sections 153, 154 and 155. The law prescribes penalties of between 7 and 15 years, however, there are no reports of there being recent prosecutions using these laws and there is little evidence of societal prejudice against people because of either sexual orientation or gender identity.

Tuvalu is not currently active in the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (PSDN) and we were unable to find any evidence of active LGBTI organisations or events on the 26km² island nation.

Although Tuvalu signed the UN declaration in support of LGBT rights in 2008, it subsequently rejected a recommendation in 2013 to repeal all provisions that criminalise consensual same-sex conduct as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process (which is a mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council). There are no reports of any moves to repeal anti LGBTI laws in the penal code to date.

LGBTI people in Vanuatu were decriminalised in 2007 although the country, which gained its independence from Britain and France in 1980, has not yet introduced any anti-discrimination legislation. In 2008, the country signed a UN declaration in support of LGBTI rights. There is no word in any of the local languages for homosexuality or trans, and some evidence of social stigma being attached to both.

Although Vanuatu does not recognise same-sex unions there were local newspaper reports that a same-sex marriage took place between a lesbian couple on an island resort just outside the Capital of Port Vila in September 2013. The Minister for Internal Affairs at the time, Patrick Crowby, denied the reports and issued a warning to pastors that they were not allowed to preside over same-sex marriages. The Government have since told churches and resorts they will face heavy fines if they marry gay and lesbian couples.

Love Patrol is a ni-Vanuatu television series, popular across the Pacific region, which

tackles issues of sexual health, corruption, religion and gender equality. Actor Gillio 'Gigi' Baxter, who plays the gay character Andy, says that the show's success across the Pacific has helped build the collective esteem of the MSM community in Vanuatu, and stir public debate on gender equality.

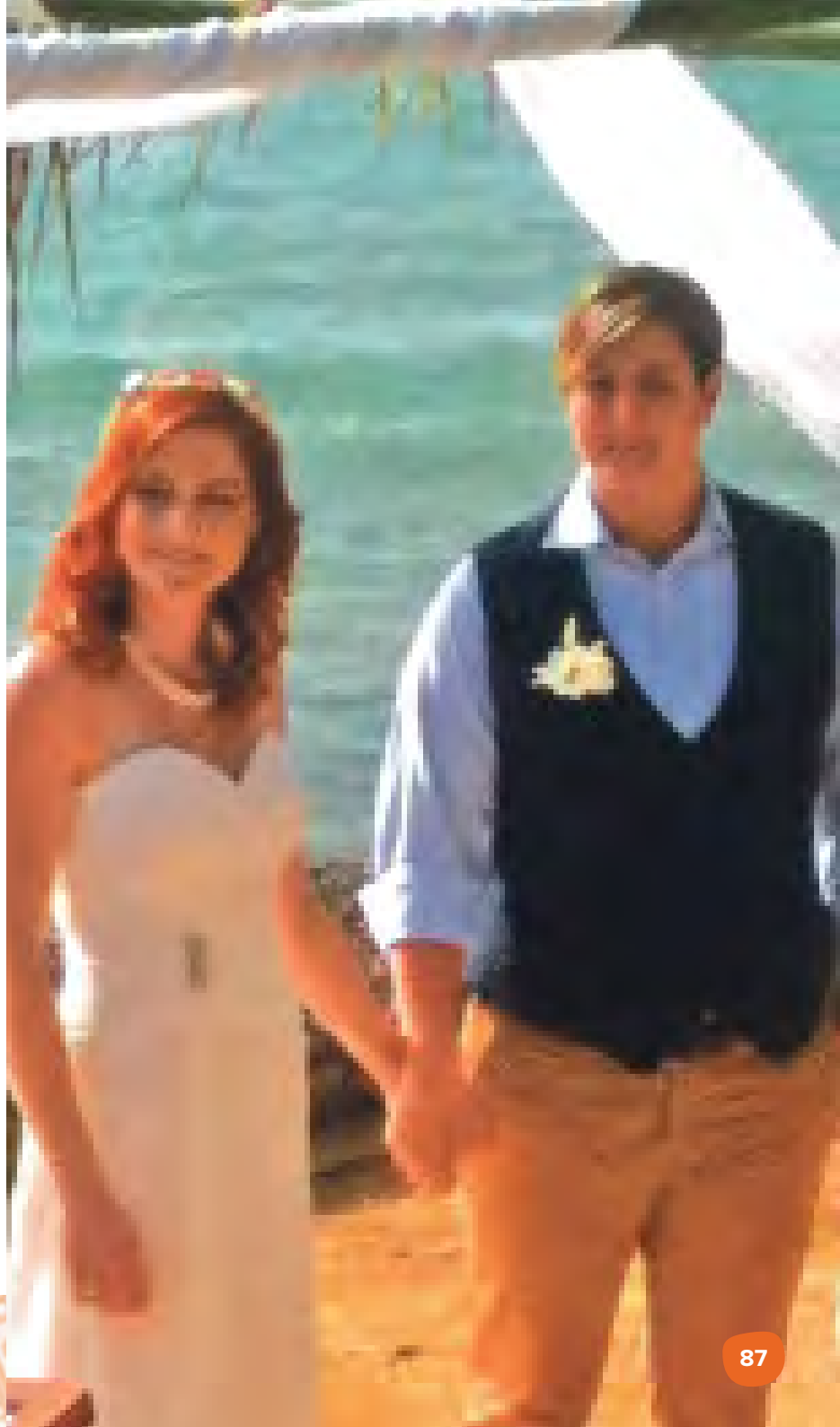
In addition to her role as an Adviser to Solidarity, an organisation that supports men who have sex with men (MSM) and the transgender community in Vanuatu, Ms Baxter is a board member of the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (PSDN), a regional network of organisations addressing the sexual health needs and rights of MSM and transgender communities in the Pacific. Formed in 2007, its members hail from Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

"We are all part of a tightly woven Pacifica family and even though the sun-bleached beaches and lazy palms of the many islands and atolls are separated by a watery

expanse, our hearts are close.
So as GLBTI and human rights
awareness is raised anywhere,
so it does throughout the region.

“These days I see a lot of
gay people out in Port Vila
embracing their sexuality. They
have gained their self-esteem.
That is a huge change in Port
Vila despite the Christian
influence. We still follow the
Bible and we respect the Bible
as a guide but we need to listen
to our hearts and minds and
express how we want to feel.
Now gay people are accepted
here in Port Vila, though sadly
not yet everywhere in Vanuatu.
We are able to be whoever we
want to be.” **Gillio Baxter**

- Newspapers reported a same-sex marriage had taken place in the country.



ASIA

ASIA IS HOME TO THE MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY IN THE COMMONWEALTH. THE 53 countries of the Commonwealth have a combined population of 2.1 billion people, almost a third of the world population, and more than half of those, 1.24 billion, live in India alone. The Maldives has the smallest population of Commonwealth members in the region at just under 400k.

Not a single Commonwealth member in the region has taken the step of repealing anti-LGBTI laws, many under Section 377 of the criminal code which was put in place in many countries in the region during British colonial rule. LGBTI people in Asia campaign for rights in very difficult circumstances, but thanks to their work there is hope of progress in the region.

Bangladesh is a very religious country where societal and religious traditions lead to commonplace discrimination against LGBTI people. This is reflected in the country's laws which criminalise LGBTI people. Section 377 of the Penal Code makes same-sex intimacy between both women and men illegal, punishable with imprisonment from ten years to life. The laws were originally put in place in 1860 during the British Raj.

There appears to be intense social pressure to marry someone of the opposite sex, grounded in a patriarchal model of society. Non-family

members, including police and religious fundamentalist groups, have been known to blackmail, harass and even physically attack LGBTI people. These "morality minders" are not sanctioned by the government, but they take advantage of the absence of civil rights and hate crime laws for sexual and gender minorities.

The Bangladeshi LGBTI community have widely used the internet to organise. One of the first groups, Gay Bangladesh, started in 1999, and boasted over 1000 members, however, after the death of its founder, Rengyu, its activity »

- Section 377, a colonial relic, is found in the penal codes of many countries across the region



» went into decline. In 2002, two other online groups appeared on the Yahoo! portal, Teen Gay Bangladesh and Boys Only Bangladesh. Both groups were deleted by Yahoo! authorities in December 2002, and after several attempts to re-appear, and name changes, the only surviving group remains Boys Only Bangladesh, now called Boys of Bangladesh (BoB). The group is the largest network for Bangladeshi gay men, organising numerous LGBT rights-related events in Dhaka since 2009. It is a non-registered, non-funded and non-formal group run by a pool of volunteers. Boys of Bangladesh aims to build a gay community in the country and works to repeal Section 377 of the Penal Code and break the taboo around sex and sexuality in the country, challenging discriminatory society norms.

Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS) was formed in 1996 to address concerns of human rights abuses and the denial of sexual health rights, providing a rights-based approach to health and social services for the most stigmatised and vulnerable populations in Bangladesh, MSM in particular kothis, feminine

men or boys who take a feminine role in same sex relationships with other men, and hijras, transsexual or transgender people, and their partners. BSWS have been officially registered since 1997 and started with a staff of two running a small programme in Central Dhaka which was supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy. Over the years it has emerged as a national community led organisation currently providing social and health services to a broad range of sexual minority populations in 21 districts in Bangladesh.

In a significant step forward for sexual minorities in Bangladesh, the country's first LGBTQI Bengali-language magazine, 'Roopbaan', was launched in January 2014 by a group of volunteers. The magazine, aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, hopes to promote greater acceptance of the community, who face widespread discrimination in the Muslim-majority country.

LGBTI rights activists have criticised the government for rejecting the Universal Periodic Review's recommendations on

decriminalisation of homosexuality. According to LGBT Bangladesh, another group working for LGBT rights, “Two of the recommendations were to decriminalise same-sex relationships by abolishing Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code, which is a remainder of British colonialism.”

The national identity system in Bangladesh has still not made changes to the National ID cards of transgender people who do not fit within the exclusionary categories of male and female, despite recognising and admitting that this is short-sighted.

“When I came out publicly, it really wasn’t a shock. My classmates somehow learned to accept me; however, the bullying never stopped. The seniors and the juniors started calling me names and some of the seniors even went physical on me. People used to steal my copies, stationery, and pencil-bags; all because I was gay. Of course, when I came out to my mom, she didn’t support it: she gave me a long lecture about how it’s unnatural and wrong.

“I’m in ninth grade now. The bullying hasn’t stopped; people got tired but I still get the occasional snide remark from a senior. The games teacher still doesn’t let me play and manages to insult me every time I see him. I’ve learned to ignore that. I have a bunch of wonderful, accepting friends who don’t really care what my sexual orientation is.

“I guess I just got lucky: if this were some other school, I would have had to face way worse than what I faced here. Some people still choose to tell me that homosexuality is an ‘abomination’ and that I’ll go to hell for being gay. I wouldn’t say that it doesn’t hurt, but I just choose to ignore it.

“Homophobia ruined my childhood. As a child, I wasn’t strong enough to bear the insults and the punches all the other kids threw at me. I used to come home and cry every day, and the worst part was that I couldn’t tell anybody else. If only the society was a bit more tolerant, and parents taught their children that it is okay to be different, I could have had a nice childhood.”

Anonymous



Brunei has recently taken a major step backwards in a very worrying development for LGBTI people in the country. Following a decision by the country's ruler the Sultan of Brunei to phase in sharia law, the punishment for homosexuality will be increased to death by lapidation – stoning to death.

The previous punishment had been imprisonment for up to 10 years, a remnant of British rule which ended in 1984.

There are no legal prohibitions on female homosexuality, or being trans, but Brunei Darussalam is a largely conservative Muslim society.

While gender reassignment surgery is permitted and there are openly trans people living in Darussalam, there is some evidence of persecution. In 2009, seven trans individuals living in Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital city, were arrested by the Royal Brunei Police and subjected to forced HIV tests.

ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, which is a group established for the ten ASEAN

(Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries (Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Brunei and Indonesia) are focused on doing human rights work based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in the region, although they do not have any current members from Brunei, which may be due to the harsh penalties that people would face should they decide to speak out.

Researchers from the University Brunei Darussalam (UBD) reported, in January 2011, that despite the gay community's "silence", the number of the sub-groups is "rising" and they have even "formed clubs exclusively catering to homosexual men."

The research project, by two researchers at the Academy of Brunei Studies at UBD, was based on interviews and questionnaires with 29 gay men and focuses on a demographic breakdown on homosexual men and their relationships with other men.

In December 2013, a Supreme Court ruling reversed a landmark 2009 High Court order which had decriminalised homosexual acts. The court said it was up to parliament to legislate on the issue. According to Section 377, a 153-year-old colonial-era law, a same-sex relationship is an “unnatural offence” and is punishable by a 10-year jail term.

Several political, social and religious groups had petitioned the Supreme Court to have the law reinstated in the wake of the 2009 court ruling. As the last legal resort, in March 2014, several pro-LGBT groups filed a curative petition with the Supreme Court. In April 2014, the Supreme Court decided it will hear arguments and determine whether there is merit in re-opening the case. The hearing is still pending.

Correspondents working in India say although laws are rarely used to prosecute anyone for consensual sex, they have often been used by the police to harass LGBTI people. Homosexuality is a taboo topic in the country and many people still regard same-sex relationships as illegitimate.

In another landmark ruling in April 2014, India's Supreme Court recognised transgender people as a third gender. The ruling ordered the government to provide transgender people with quotas in jobs and education in line with other minorities, as well as key amenities.

Members of the country's hijra communities have played a prominent role in Indian culture and were once treated with great respect. They find mention in the ancient Hindu scriptures and were written about in the greatest epics Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international NGO working for the practical realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth, based in New Delhi. CHRI believes that criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults in private is wrong and is working for the repeal of discriminatory laws in the country and around the commonwealth.

There are many LGBTI organisations and groups in India working for LGBTI equality and human »

- » rights. Equal India Alliance is a non-profit organisation which aims to build welcoming environments for India's LGBT community, principally at colleges and in the workplace. They are helping to bring acceptance and support out into the open. The organisation launched the "I, Ally" campaign in May 2013. It is a straight ally engagement campaign that aims to record video messages of support from straight allies from all across India, in multiple languages.

The purpose of the project is to raise awareness regarding the fact that India is not a regressive country and that the environment is conducive to understanding, respecting, and accepting the LGBTIQ community. It is also targeted towards young LGBTIQ Indians who are trying to come out and are looking for support. In addition, this campaign is also directed to all the politicians and lawmakers in India who believe that the country is not ready to decriminalise same-sex relationships yet.

The Humsafar Trust (HST) is a community-based organisation of self-identified gay men, MSM, transgender, hijras and LBT persons in

Mumbai since 1994. HST currently manages six projects on prevention, care, support and treatment, reaching out to over 9,000 MSM and transgender people in Mumbai Metro. It also provides legal support, crisis management, mental health counselling and nutrition counselling to its communities.

Lakshya Trust is a community-based organisation registered as a public charitable trust that has been the centre of excellence in the field of sexual health programmes for the community since its inception in 2000. The organisation works on various issues addressing and advocating the social, economic, legal, psychological, spiritual and health aspects of sexual minorities (Gay, Bisexual and Transgender population) in the western Indian state of Gujarat.



Equal Alliance India's "I, Ally" Campaign

▶ <http://youtube.com/iallycampaign>



365 without 377 trailer

▶ <http://youtu.be/Ea-dk1KPj28>



- Members of LGBTI community react after the judgement of the Supreme Court to uphold section 377

Malaysia has two sets of laws – civil law and Islamic sharia law. Civil laws are administered at the federal level and apply to everyone regardless of religious background. The civil criminal code retains colonial era anti-sodomy laws and proscribes oral sex and ‘gross indecency’ with sentences of up to 20 years or in some cases corporal punishment. Sharia law is administered at the state level and applies only to Muslims. While sharia law is the same in each state, the enforcement and penalties vary. In addition, in 1983, a fatwa was introduced to prohibit sex reassignment surgery for Muslim trans people.

In 2008 a coalition of non-governmental organisations, artists, and individuals organised an annual sexuality rights festival, Seksualiti Merdeka, meaning “Independent Sexuality”, in the capital Kuala Lumpur. The festival consisted of talks, performances, screenings, workshops, and forums to promote sexuality rights as a human right, to empower marginalised individuals and communities, and to create platforms for advocacy. Unfortunately the festival was banned by the Government in

November 2011, and in March 2012, the High Court refused to grant leave to the appellants to initiate a judicial review.

There are a number of LGBTI groups working in Malaysia. PT Foundation (previously known as Pink Triangle) is a community-based, voluntary non-profit making organisation providing HIV/ AIDS education, prevention, care and support programmes, sexual health and empowerment programmes for vulnerable communities in Malaysia. One of the PT Foundation’s current campaigns is the ‘I AM YOU: BE A TRANS ALLY’ ongoing educational campaign which was created to raise awareness regarding the trans community in Malaysia. Ultimately, I AM YOU aims to bridge the gap between the trans* community and the rest of Malaysian society through the promotion of tolerance and acceptance.

Justice For Sisters is a grassroots campaign organised by concerned members of the public to raise public awareness regarding violence, persecution and discrimination against the Mak Nyah (male-to-female transsexual) community in Malaysia. They therefore champion equal

opportunities, rights and access to justice for this community. On the 8th June 2014, 16 trans women were arrested at a wedding ceremony and jailed for seven days each. Justice for Sisters (JFS) campaigned to raise enough money for the women to be bailed.

Several other groups such as Sisters in Islam, Women's Aid Organisation, and Amnesty International also have dealt with sexual orientation issues within their public health advocacy. The focus on AIDS-HIV education has allowed for more public discussion of sexual orientation, gender identity and human rights.

In July 2013, Hazreen Shaik Daud became Malaysia's first trans politician with her appointment as a political secretary to Tanjung Bungah, Democratic Action Party (DAP) state assemblyman in Teh Yee Cheu.

"While the state may be hostile towards LGBTQ people in Malaysia, there is a strong sense of community and resistance as well desire for change. It is very encouraging to see

parents, friends and members of the community come together to support each other, and to celebrate love and diversity. Although in a very small scale." **S. Thilaga Socky Pillai**



I Am You: Discrimination
PT Foundation.

 <http://youtu.be/Kb4SIDiVj50>

- Campaigners with 'I AM YOU: Be a Trans Ally' wristbands



THE MALDIVES pop. 393,500

Both male and female same-sex conduct is illegal in the country. The Penal Code of Maldives does not regulate sexual conduct, however it is regulated by uncodified Sharia law. For men, the punishment is banishment for nine months to one year or a whipping of 10 to 30 strokes, while the punishment for women is house arrest for nine months to one year.

Homosexuality is heavily stigmatised and discriminated against in the Maldives, not only by the government, but also by parts of society. The stigma and discrimination that LGBTI Maldivians face is often directly related to the very religious ethos of the islands. ILGA

reports that they are unaware of any LGBTI organisations, publications or public activities. There are however a number of active facebook groups and pages which focus on social connections for LGBTI people in the country.

In 2008 the Maldives became one of 57 signatories to an opposition statement (initiated by Syria) that countered the UN's declaration for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, claiming that the statement "delves into matters which fall essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states" and could lead to "the social normalization, and possibly the legitimization, of many deplorable acts including paedophilia."

PAKISTAN pop. 182,490,721

Despite growing tolerance of LGBTI people and relationships amongst urban middle and upper class communities as well as, traditionally, some tolerance of intergenerational male to male relations in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, research conducted by the Pew Research Centre on tolerance to homosexuality

among 39 countries, published in June 2013, found that Pakistan was the most intolerant of homosexuality.

Same-sex conduct is illegal according to the Penal Code of 1860 and the Hudood Ordinance of 1979. The law states "Whoever

voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature... shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than two years nor more than ten years". However the laws are rarely enforced.

The internet has played a large role in social networking and tackling social isolation faced by LGBTI people in Pakistan, with websites like facebook, Orkut and blogs being used for support groups and networks. One of the issues that has opened up public discussion about LGBTI rights has been the effort to combat the spread of AIDS-HIV among men who have sex with other men. Pakistani LGBTI groups are cautiously seeking to expand their presence in a country where it is illegal to engage in homosexual activity. Using the internet and email, LGBT people are finding ways to congregate, creating support groups and other mechanisms to provide them a voice.

Forum for Dignity Initiatives (FDI) Pakistan is the first initiative of its kind. FDI campaigns for the protection and promotion of human rights of

marginalised groups, including sex workers and transgender people, in order to achieve social inclusion and a decent living.

Queer Pakistan is an LGBTQ group of people living in the country. Their aim is to use its website and the power of social media to represent themselves and to voice their concerns about various issues. Secondly they aim to provide support to the most marginalised LGBTQ community of Pakistan that has lived in the shadows. This organisation believes in working together for the common cause and is therefore interested in forming both nationwide and international alliances with rights groups, sex education and sexual health organisations, psychological support organisations and other relevant groups.

In 2009 a landmark ruling in the Supreme Court extended benefits and equal protection to Pakistan's trans community under the leadership of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. As a result, they can now vote and run for political office. However there are still high levels of social discrimination faced by »

- » Pakistan's hijra community. Reports suggest that hijras often were denied places in schools or admission to hospitals, and landlords often refused to rent or sell property to them.

Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA) is an organisation working for the equality and civil rights of transgender people in Pakistan. Their aim is to raise awareness of the issues concerning transgender people in Pakistan and cultivate a supportive, empowering and non-judgmental environment. They hope to achieve the acceptance of transgender people as equal members of Pakistani society. One of the main objectives of GIA is to advocate and facilitate employment for transgender Pakistanis. In that way, three members of the transgender community were offered jobs by the Sindh government last February. The government also organised a vocational training workshop for the transgender community.

"I am a 22 year old Muslim Pakistani, and I am very comfortable with who I am. I knew that I was attracted to men as well as women from

a very young age. Truth be told, it wasn't ever confusing for me. It wasn't much of a big deal for me, nor for my parents. They accepted it from the start, and for me it was the most awesome thing any LGBT person could ask for.

"I feel that I have the right to come out to the people I want to and live my life the way I want. I am living the life that I want to live. My sexual orientation is just a part of who I am, and I am more concerned about excelling in what I want to do. It shouldn't be 'straight people are different from me' or secluding yourself with one group. We are all people; different, but still, people." **Farid-ul-Haq**



- Awareness campaign event calling for human rights for transgender people and sex workers

In June 2014, LGBTI people, their friends and allies took part in the sixth annual 'Pink Dot' event, so named as attendees wearing pink create a huge 'pink dot' in the Singapore's Hong Lim Park. Despite calls for the event to be banned by opponents of LGBTI rights, over 26,000 people attended which was a record turnout for the event in the city state. A previous gathering of LGBTI people and their allies called the Nation Party was banned in 2005 by the government. In response, LGBTI activists organised Indignation, a series of events that would de-emphasise the "party" aspects of gay culture and instead provide a forum for LGBTI creative expression and political commentary. In August 2007, several public Indignation events were banned on the basis that they "promoted a gay lifestyle".

There are many active LGBTI organisations in Singapore, a country where rarely enforced laws criminalise male same-sex activity with sentences of up to 2 years. Challenges to this law, section 377A, are currently underway, one involving the defendant Ivan Tan Eng Hong and the other by a gay couple, Kenneth Chee and

Gary Lim. The High Court has so far refused to repeal 377A in both cases, and the Court of Appeal has agreed to hear both cases together.

The country is the only place in Southeast Asia that allows for gender to be changed on identity cards, however only as a result of gender reassignment surgery.

The Purple Alliance (TPA) is a Singapore-based, volunteer-run LGBTQ+ group founded in 2012. The group works to provide services that support the dignity and wellbeing of the Singaporean LGBTQ population. In addition, the group holds film nights, facilitates special social groups for trans youth and ethnic minorities, and conducts academic research. Its ethnographic and survey-based research has been presented in Singapore, the United States and the Republic of Ireland. TPA is a two-time winner of the national Take Action grant competition and works closely with Oogachaga, Singapore's leading counselling and personal development organisation for LGBTQ+ individuals, Oogachaga are a non-profit organisation, and a member »

- » organisation of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA).

SgButterfly.org (SgB) is an online portal founded in 2005, designed and dedicated for Singapore's Transgender Community as a platform in providing goodwill information and raising awareness on transgender issues in Singapore.

On November 2013, a campaign was launched by activist and lawyer Lawrence Bernard Wee Kim San to raise funds for legal costs to challenge workplace discrimination. The campaign "Stop hurting, quit labeling" aims to change Article 12 of the Singaporean Constitution to include equal protection for LGBT workers and was launched at the home of film and theatre director Glen Goei with prominent actors and politicians in attendance. However, in May 2014, the Supreme Court of Singapore ruled against the legal challenge.

"Singapore masquerades itself as a modern, cosmopolitan city, but when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity, is stuck

in a time warp. Consensual sex between men is criminalised under the law, media representations of queer sexualities are policed by government regulators and there are no laws to protect queer people from discrimination. As a child, I was exorcised by a member of my mother's church for being gay, learned the word 'lesbian' from a cover of the country's local tabloid and received sex education that positioned homosexuality as immoral and unnatural. As an adult, not much of this has changed: Religious institutions are still allowed to perpetuate discrimination via public platforms, 'themes' of 'homosexuality' are paralleled with 'themes' of terrorism, suicide and child abuse, and a feminist organisation was recently condemned for daring to suggest in its sex ed curriculum, that 'homosexuality' is a neutral word." **Tania De Rozario**



Stop Hurting, Quit Labeling

Campaign for LGBT workplace equality.

<http://vimeo.com/79280967>

- 26,000 supporters of LGBTI human rights attended the annual 'Pink Dot' event





Sri Lanka is a country in which LGBTI people and activism are limited by conservative cultural views and the illegality of same-sex conduct. Under Section 365A of the country's penal code homosexual acts are punishable by a jail term of up to ten years.

The law applied only to homosexual men until 1995, when the law was amended to be "gender neutral", resulting in the criminalisation of both male and female same-sex activity. Although the law is rarely enforced it continues to be used to threaten and harass LGBTI people.

Equal Ground is a non-profit organisation seeking human and political rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning (LGBTIQ) community of Sri Lanka.

They are committed to creating a safe space for all LGBTIQ individuals and to providing opportunities for self-help including mental well-being, economic,

social and political empowerment, access to health, education, housing and legal protection for the LGBTIQ community.

A recent study by Equal Ground found that 90% of trans people and 65% of gay men reported experiencing police violence based on their sexuality and/or gender identity. The law still retains widespread support amongst lawyers and the police

In June 2012, the LGBTIQ rights group started a petition to the Sri Lankan government to repeal colonial anti-gay laws and on May 17th 2013 they commemorated the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) by uploading two videos on YouTube, called 'Homophobia Hurts' and 'We Stand Up for Equality'.

In June 2014 LGBTI people in the country celebrated 10 years of Colombo Pride with a programme of events and a beach party. The event was supported by a number of foreign embassies to the country.

"I met my friend Malini and our friendship turned into a love affair after some time. We both worked together and did everything together.

"After sometime, Malini's parents brought in a marriage proposal for her and decided to give her in marriage. Malini had no courage to refuse as she was helpless. I was shocked and grieved. I became like a dead body. I once wanted to commit suicide. Malini got married and went to her husband's house. They have a daughter now. My whole life became senseless and still my love for Malini has not faded away. I look forward to seeing her someday. I want to thank all those with whom I shared my story and grief." **Renuka**



Equal Ground –

We Stand Up For Equality

▶ <http://youtu.be/LBOIz6lghME>



- A poster for the 2014 Sri Lanka Pride event held in Colombo

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