

PRESS RELEASE: New research shows extent of progress on rights of LGBT citizens in the Commonwealth

Research launched today shows the extent of progress being made by countries across the Commonwealth in upholding the rights of LGBT citizens. The research shows that many governments are reforming laws, speaking out to protect minorities and creating new policies to educate societies. Many of these have been undertaken with the support of local LGBT communities and organisations.

The research is contained in a new report, *A Commonwealth Toolkit for Policy Progress on LGBT Rights* published by the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Kaleidoscope Trust and the Commonwealth Equality Network.

Highlights of this policy progress include:

- Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment law in countries as diverse as Botswana, Seychelles, Samoa and Saint Lucia.
- Repeal of colonial-era bans on consensual same sex relations between adults, most recently occurring in Mozambique.
- Supreme court judgments upholding the rights of ‘third gender’ groups such as Hijras and Kothis in India and Pakistan.
- The formation of a Consultative Council of LGBT organisations to advise the Government of Malta on areas of policy and legislation.

The report also highlights that, despite the fact that 40 of the 53 Commonwealth members criminalise same sex relations between consenting adults in some way, the modern Commonwealth can play a positive role in improving the lives of LGBT citizens.

Speaking about the report, the Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society Michael Lake CBE said, “We have got to move beyond a finger wagging approach and use the Commonwealth to offer practical support to governments wanting to make positive change to support LGBT citizens”.

The role of local civil society groups in supporting governments to create policies that protect the rights of LGBT citizens is another feature of the report. It includes several examples of collaboration between governments and LGBT communities and organisations in areas of police training, education for health care professionals and anti-bullying campaigns.

Executive Director of the Kaleidoscope Trust, Dr Felicity Daly said, “the growing influence of LGBT activism on national stakeholders demonstrates what can be achieved when such activists have sufficient support to engage in developing effective interventions that are informed by their experiences.”

Many of the laws which discriminate against lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens have their roots in anti-sodomy laws imposed on Commonwealth countries by the British Empire. Several countries are seeking to reform these laws and increase protections for LGB people.

The Chair of the Commonwealth Equality Network, which includes LGBT organisations from all five regions of the Commonwealth, Rosanna Flamer-Caldera from Sri Lanka said, “As countries face sometimes insurmountable challenges particularly on LGBTIQ issues, it is more vital now than ever that we push harder for change in the Commonwealth in order to ensure that all LGBTIQ person's issues are always on the table, with the final goal of decriminalization in ALL countries of the Commonwealth.”

The report also includes policies which seek to improve the rights of transgender citizens.

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Notes to editors:

A Commonwealth Toolkit for Policy Progress on LGBT Rights is published by the Royal Commonwealth Society, Kaleidoscope Trust and the Commonwealth Equality Network. A full downloadable version of the report can be found [here](#).



The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS promotes the value and the values of the Commonwealth. We champion human rights, democracy and sustainable development across the 53 member states which are intrinsically linked through their common history and shared values.

Kaleidoscope Trust The Kaleidoscope Trust works to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people internationally by listening to, amplifying and communicating their voices to a wider audience, and by

standing with them in persuading public and political opinion of the need for an end to all discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We work with activists and organisations around the world to advance the belief that the rights of all people should be respected equally, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.



The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), established in 2013 is a network of Commonwealth civil society organisations working to challenge inequality in the Commonwealth, based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Network was set up with the aim of giving a voice to LGBTI communities across the Commonwealth and to support joint advocacy in identifying a Commonwealth solution to a Commonwealth problem. Much like the Commonwealth itself, the membership of the Network is dominated by organisations in low and middle-income countries, in particular sub Saharan Africa.

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