

NEW EQUALITY AND JUSTICE ALLIANCE TO LEAD £5.6 MILLION COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMME TO REFORM DISCRIMINATORY LAWS

London, 27 April 2018: The Equality & Justice Alliance – a consortium composed of international NGOs Human Dignity Trust, Kaleidoscope Trust, The Royal Commonwealth Society and Sisters For Change – will implement a £5.6 million programme to build fairer, more equal and more inclusive Commonwealth societies by supporting countries seeking to reform laws that discriminate against women and girls and LGBT people.

We welcome the announcement made by Prime Minister Theresa May during the Commonwealth Summit in London last week that the Foreign & Commonwealth Office will fund the Alliance's ambitious 2-year programme, which will engage with Commonwealth leaders, governments and civil society actors to advance equality and equal protection before the law in order to secure the rights of all Commonwealth citizens, regardless of gender, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression.

Speaking to the Joint Forums of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Prime Minister expressed "deep regret" for Britain's historic role in instituting "discriminatory laws made many years ago [that] continue to affect the lives of many people, criminalising same sex relations and failing to protect women and girls". The result of these laws is that women and girls and LGBT individuals do not have equal protection of the law and still suffer discrimination, violence and/or criminalisation on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity in many Commonwealth countries.

The Equality & Justice Alliance's programme will provide support to countries that are seeking to address this systemic discrimination by working with a range of stakeholders to secure the rights of women and girls and LGBT people. The programme will:

- Support Commonwealth civil society organisations to work intersectionally and conduct advocacy to engage with the legislative and policy process;
- Convene a series of regional dialogues to build a better understanding of international standards and best practice, strengthen policy exchanges between civil society, officials and experts and to highlight the benefits of legal reform;
- Provide a range of legal and policy research tools and technical legal assistance and expertise to Commonwealth governments seeking to reform discriminatory laws, combat violence against women and girls, eliminate hate crimes and increase access to justice.

The Royal Commonwealth Society Executive Director Michael Lake CBE said, "The UK Government's support of this initiative, as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, demonstrates the Commonwealth's commitment to combat structural and systemic inequality and builds upon the Commonwealth's proud history of taking action to promote and protect democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law."

Kaleidoscope Trust Executive Director Paul Dillane said: "The Equality & Justice Alliance is delighted to be delivering this important initiative and looks forward to working with a range of Commonwealth Governments, activists and regional experts to push forward equal rights and end discrimination

against LGBT communities.”

Sisters For Change Executive Director Alison Gordon OBE said, “Ending subordination of and discrimination against women and girls – in law and practice – is central to combating violence against women and girls and building more just and inclusive societies. The Equality and Justice Alliance – with women’s rights and LGBT organisations working together – highlights the value and power of working intersectionally to ensure equality for all.”

Human Dignity Trust Director Téa Braun said, “The law plays a central role in ensuring equality and human dignity for all, regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. The Equality and Justice Alliance is delighted to be able to help leverage global legal expertise and experience to support Commonwealth governments to pursue vital law reform to end discrimination and violence.”

NOTES

Kaleidoscope Trust is dedicated to promoting and advancing equality and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people internationally. Since its establishment in 2011, the Trust has established itself as a leading human rights NGO by developing strategic networks that bring international LGBT activists together with British and international policy-makers, parliamentarians, civil society organisations and business leaders. Kaleidoscope Trust works with activists and organisations in 50+ countries to create positive change for LGBT people where they face discrimination, criminalisation and violence.

Sisters For Change is an international non-governmental organisation (registered as a UK charity) that works to combat violence against women and girls through legal empowerment and social accountability programmes. We work to generate systemic change in how governments combat violence, structural change to give women voice and agency in justice mechanisms and social change to end the social acceptance of violence against women and girls. Our mission is to make justice work better for marginalised women and girls.

The Human Dignity Trust is an organisation of international lawyers that supports local partners to uphold human rights and constitutional law in countries where private consensual sexual conduct between adults of the same sex is criminalised. The Trust mobilises the intellectual resources of the international legal community in support of local actors who seek to challenge laws that persecute people on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the modern Commonwealth. With an international network of individuals and over 60 branches, it seeks to identify contemporary issues and practical solutions that contribute to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens. Through advocacy, education and youth empowerment, the RCS champions human rights, democracy and sustainable development across the 53 member states, which are intrinsically linked through their common history and shared values.

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