

Rt Hon. William Hague
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign & Commonwealth Office,
King Charles Street,
London.
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17 October 2011

Dear Mr. Hague

Justice for Gay Africans (JfGA) would like to express its appreciation for the immense effort your department is putting forth to encourage equality and respect for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people around the world where the United Kingdom has its outposts. It is worth noting that your support has led to relaxation in certain quarters on the rigid discrimination against sexual minorities and has encouraged local LGBT groups to continue working boldly towards building better societies.

As you may know, however, this work has not been getting easier due to existing anti-homosexuality laws in so many of the affected countries; especially in the Commonwealth.

In the Commonwealth, where majority of its 54 member-states still criminalize homosexuality, it continues to prove difficult and even life threatening for LGBT people to survive normally, let alone comfortably. While Britain may be partially blamed in the history of these situations, JfGA is suggesting a change of approach and a proactive move to bring about the needed positive change.

It is in the hope for this that we are calling on your office to keep on a forward-moving trajectory with the work it is doing. As your action has laid a foundation for boldness and support in affected countries, we think it is time you move to the next level of lobbying—the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

In the last two years, we have worked closely with the Human Rights Unit in the Commonwealth Secretariat and recently, following the Secretary General's (SG) public statement at the Commonwealth Law Ministers' gathering in Sydney, we met with the office of the SG represented by Deputy SG, Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, at the Secretariat to discuss ways forward.

Many grassroots groups in the Commonwealth have done a great deal of work and the level of need for a positive change on the issue of criminalization of homosexuality in the Commonwealth could not be more important as it is now.

To achieve this, the Commonwealth Secretariat itself needs a clear mandate in the form of encouragement to move forward in guiding necessary change. And in that vein, we know that the next and only level is to bring this issue to discussion in a CHOGM gathering.

All the stakeholders in the Commonwealth, from civil society to the recently-formed Eminent Persons Group (EPG) have been engaged and are aware of the rising necessity for this discussion to happen.

It is with this sensitivity that we call on you to impress upon the Australian Foreign Minister, The Honourable Kevin Rudd, and the Australian Prime Minister, as the host of the oncoming CHOGM and saddled with the responsibility of drawing up the agenda, to bring LGBT Rights issue to CHOGM, to be held in Perth, Australia in October.

In doing so, we would respectfully ask that you consider the following points of note as highly importance for a constructive discussion at the meeting:

1. Removing laws that criminalise homosexuality
2. Ensuring member states fulfil their pledges in various Treaties and Declarations, including the Principles of the Commonwealth, all of which suggest non-discrimination of citizens based on sex, gender, race, age and other natural features.
3. Promoting the protection of LGBT people from violence, intimidation, and denial of access to services (i.e. health).

The above would be consistent with the human rights values endorsed by the Commonwealth in the Lusaka Declaration in 1979, Harare Declaration 1991 and the recent 2009 Port of Spain Declaration.

In the light of the above, we know that the Commonwealth has yet to take a decisive public position about these sufferings hence disregarding its own principles of "democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all". This meeting would be the right time considering the level we have come on this. That would also be keeping in line with the 21st century when the world should be a freer and fairer place. We would implore you to bring this to bear.

I am of no doubt that your intervention and pushing for the above issues with your Australian counterpart at this CHOGM would yield a milestone result. This would also be acceptable to former British colonies as a respectful way of approaching the issues on a level playing ground.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Sincerely,



Godwyns Onwuchekwa
Chair
Justice for Gay Africans
London, UK