

15th July 2009

Dr. Mark Collins
Director
Commonwealth Foundation
Marlborough House
Pall Mall, London
SW1Y 5HY
United Kingdom

Dear Dr. Collins,

**RE: PROMOTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL CITIZENS IN THE
COMMONWEALTH REGARDLESS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER
IDENTITY**

Greetings from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) organizations from the Commonwealth of Nations!

We commend the recent decisions of the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia and India in recognizing the needs of its citizens and taking progressive steps towards ensuring equal rights for all. We see great strides being made by many of the Commonwealth member states in ensuring that the human rights of its LGBT citizens are upheld. However, even with the positive steps taken by the Delhi High Court ruling recently (India, 2 July 2009) and although the British Government through the Foreign and Commonwealth office have adopted a programme to support the human rights of LGBT persons around the world, too many of the Commonwealth member states still criminalize homosexuality and discriminate, marginalize and stigmatize their citizens based solely on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The UK Foreign Office Minister is calling for the issue of gay rights to be addressed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) this November in the Caribbean. LGBT citizens in these countries are subjected to arbitrary arrests, violence and social stigma and in some countries, are put to death for just being who they are. As of May this year, 42 countries within the Commonwealth still criminalize homosexuality. This is an appalling statistic.

We urge you to be true to the mandate of the Commonwealth Foundation which clearly states that it is to 'strengthen civil society in the achievement of Commonwealth priorities – namely, respect for human rights'. Towards fulfilling this mandate, we are writing to urge your organisation to address the safeguarding of rights of the millions of LGBT persons living in the Commonwealth countries and to support civil society in seeking a resolution at the next Commonwealth Leaders Summit in Trinidad and Tobago – namely, to decriminalize Homosexuality in the 42 member states that continue to criminalize adult same sex relationships.

We call on you to extend the Foundation's fullest support to assist civil society to effectively lobby Commonwealth governments to put in place legislations that would protect the rights of LGBTs across the Commonwealth; enable the amending of laws so that people are not imprisoned, attacked or killed for who they are.

Human Dignity and Human Rights should not be and cannot be bartered or negotiated. The right to live as citizens without criminalization, without discrimination, without stigmatization and without marginalization is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this is a 'right' that cannot and should not be ignored.

We request that LGBT organizations be given the necessary space and a meaningful platform at the Commonwealth People's Forum in Trinidad and Tobago to bring forward their issues to commence dialogue with the member states. For too long the LGBT citizens in the Commonwealth have been silenced and severely oppressed.

We need our space, we need our voices heard and we need the laws in countries to change so that we can all celebrate our humanity, our diversity and live freely, openly and fully and are afforded respect and equality in a Commonwealth that is free from criminalization, stigma and discrimination.

Sincerely,

[names/addresses and country of CSO from across the Commonwealth/including LGBT orgs]

(Asia/ Africa/Pacific/Caribbean)