



2020, May 17<sup>th</sup>

## IDAHOT Media Statement

*For immediate release:*

Today is The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia commonly known as IDAHOT.

This day was created in 2004 to draw the attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics.

The date of May 17<sup>th</sup> was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

The Day represents a major global annual landmark to draw the attention of decision makers, the media, the public, corporations, opinion leaders, local authorities, and countless members of society, to the alarming challenges and violations faced by sexually diverse people.

This year's theme, 'breaking the silence', could not have come at a more opportune time for Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities. We are in the middle of court proceedings to attain the most basic of human rights: the right to freedom of association.

We have hope but we cannot delay action any longer.





While celebrating the many milestones we have achieved, let us remember to exert pressure and help those who remain marginalised to attain the equality we are all inherently deserving of. Until the protection of the human rights of LGBTI persons is realised, some of us will always be treated as more human than others.

Modern society has come a long way through ever evolving innovations aimed at making life easier, but with time, one quickly comes to realise that the lives in question are not equal.

The solutions aimed at life in general are unsustainable. The lives of the powerful have always bore more currency than the lives of those at the margins of society.

As a dynamic species, we are made up of conflicting and contradictory identities & experiences, and any attempt at flattening that being is tantamount to taking our lives.

A sustainable and equitable future rest on the realisation that our diversity exists not only amongst us, but within us. We owe it to ourselves to recognise how we are positioned differently in society and what the consequences of that positioning are for our lives.

We require governments that do not live in a state of cognitive dissonance whereby they represent their countries at meetings on human rights issues and even endorse them but deny those same rights to their sexual and gender minorities. Government structures must be opened to the embodied knowledge of their citizens, the lesbian teacher; the disabled gay man; the trans diverse designer.





In welcoming these bodies into the room, at all times it must be remembered that we cannot leave the less desirable parts of ourselves at the door. We enter rooms in our wholeness – with all the parts that make us who we are.

When considering this perspective, I implore us to now start thinking about the ways in which we are already leaving some behind when we expect them to leave parts of themselves outside the room.

ESGM, the first organisation which has attempted to register itself as an LGBTIQ rights advocacy organization has been categorically blocked by the government. This matter is in the High Court, and therefore I cannot speak much about it.

However, the paranoia demonstrated by our government illustrates the state of LGBTIQ rights perfectly. No concrete evidence can be provided for why LGBTIQ people should not enjoy equality, but paranoia about the undoing of supposedly self-evident entitlement to rights by other citizens dictates decision making that keeps LGBTIQ people oppressed.

This, though understood to be the ethos of 'morality', cannot be made to be the law in any country that has a constitution and a bill of rights for all citizens. These circumstances impair and hinder advocacy in many ways and on many levels.

In order to do advocacy constant consultation, discussion, demonstration and persuasion is necessary. Ideally, advocacy is done at both the societal and government levels. When addressing government and policy makers, evidence of human rights violations is necessary to make the case for LGBTIQ equality.





In a society that scares people into silence and invisibility, evidence becomes a scarce commodity. The erasure caused by these circumstances fundamentally impacts advocacy in that it stifles meaningful engagement with citizens who are not a part of the LGBTIQ but are potential allies.

Opportunities for learning become difficult to enable when sentiments of criminality and/or immorality are attached to LGBTIQ people. Also, fear of being identified as a part of the community stops people from learning or offering ally-ship.

For now, many of these realities represent a dream and although we need action, starting with a dream has seen many of us change the world. My dream is that we see each other in all our diversity; that we see ourselves in each other. Today this is a dream, but let it be heard that today is the start of something new, because our dreams are valid.

Happy IDAHOT.



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