



ESWATINI SEXUAL & GENDER MINORITIES 2nd ANNUAL CONFERENCE

15th-18th September 2020

Mantenga Lodge, Ezulwini, eSwatini

Introduction

Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities [ESGM] held its second annual conference from the 15th to the 18th September 2020. There were over 45 participants who attended the conference. Participants were selected from a wide number of applicants from LGBTI community who had to write an essay titled “Reimagining the Future; an incremental approach towards LGBTI protection”. Community members who had been active in LGBTI activities were also hand-selected to participate.

The aim and objectives of the conference was to increase the protection and capacity of the LGBTI community, to shine light on September Eswatini pride month, look towards a new future for LGBTIQ protection, decide on a collective approach on advocacy and ultimately to decide on the future of activism for the LGBTIQ community.

The opening address was given by EU Ambassador, Hon. Esmerelda Hernandez, who highlighted that the EU has a non-discrimination policy on sex, religion and sexual orientation. She gave assurance that the EU is closely following the ESGM registration application at the High Court. In the regard the Conference was informed that the date of hearing for the ESGM case is October 20, 2020 at 09:30hrs..

The UN Special Rapporteur for health, Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, was present on Day 2 of the Conference, she highlighted the importance of mental health care and emphasized the need for mental health to be inclusive and affordable to all.

A panel discussion was held on day 3 of the conference titled: “Navigating advocacy on matters that are before the courts” – experiences from Botswana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

It was noted that Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the LGBTIQ community as there has often been a re-allocation of funding to Covid-19 related projects, which has resulted in the LGBTQI community being left in a vulnerable position. In addition, with the lockdown restrictions that were imposed it made advocacy engagement more challenging.



Eswatini Pride Month

On Friday evening, 18 September 2020, we had the pleasure of welcoming their Excellencies the UK High Commissioner, the Indian High Commissioner, the European Union Ambassador, the United States Ambassador, and the World Food Program director. Their excellencies joined us for conversations about the work that ESGM is doing, as well as the entire LGBTI movement in the country. This was a co-funded event, where the UK High Commission demonstrated and through a speech, the High Commissioner, shared the support of the United Kingdom on issues pertaining human rights. In his speech, the UK High Commissioner expressed their support and emphasised that ESGM and other like-minded organisation would continue to receive support from them.

Based on the extensive and highly interactive deliberations guided by various experts, the following communique was adopted:

LGBTI Rights

The Government of eSwatini needs to recognize and accept the existence of the LGBTIQ community and ensure that hate crimes against the community are investigated and perpetrators of such crimes should face justice. The Government further needs to ensure that law enforcement officers are trained to respect freedom of movement for all persons including sex workers. Freedom of expression should also be protected, and all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation must be prohibited. In addition, freedom of association must be protected in line with international standards, and individuals should not be prevented from registering organisations due to their sexual orientation.

Lesbian Community

The lesbian community is often left out of donor funded projects and more attention and focus is required to be given to their specific and unique needs.

Trans Community

The nation of eSwatini does not recognize the existence of the trans-community, this has left the community vulnerable and unprotected by the law. Moreover, the lack of access to mental healthcare for the trans-community is an issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.



The state of mental health and LGBTIQ persons

Mental health services need to be made available and accessible to all citizens. This is particularly important to the LGBTQ community who is more vulnerable to mental health issues. The State needs to prioritize resources towards mental health care. The shocking reality is that there is 1 psychiatrist and 2 psychologists made available by the state to cater to a nation of 1.3 million people. The State needs to put in place mental health policies, laws, and resources in or to address the needs of persons suffering with mental health issues. There should also be protocols and policies in place to guide the provision of mental health care. Mental healthcare needs to be financially accessible to all citizens with the option for services to be given in the local language.

LGBTI representation in socio-economic politics

The lack of economic participation is one of the major problems faced by the LGBTQI because vulnerable groups such as women and youth are the most affected by issues regarding poverty. When economic policies are developed, LGBTQI persons should be part of the discussion.

Litigation

The Conference noted the significance of a fair, impartial and independent judiciary upholds the values of human rights and democratic principles. A judiciary that is not beholden to the patriarchal norms of society but one that respects the rule of law, one that seeks to progress and advance the state of human rights in eSwatini and a judiciary that is not afraid to stand up for what is right.

ESGM and its Members undertake to:

1. Continue to advocate for the advancement of the rights of the LGBTI community in eSwatini.
2. Build partnerships with like-minded organizations in order to further the plight of the LGBTIQ community in eSwatini.
3. Build a relationship with media houses by strategically selecting journalists that report according to the values that are reflective of our own values to ensure truthful reporting.



4. Address traditional and religious norms that discriminate against the LLGBTQ community
5. Raise awareness and train citizens on the LGBTIQ community in order to break barriers and fight for inclusion and LGBTIQ acceptance within the family.