

Agenda Item 3: “Linking national, regional, and global dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” Statement LGBT*IQ+ Constituency of APRCEM

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When it comes to participation in public life, building alliances is vital for LGBTIQ+ (henceforth, LGBTI) communities, of the Global Economic South i.e Asia and the Pacific, as there are limited civic spaces in which human rights defenders and gender and sexual diverse activists can participate and advocate for our rights. Such is the case because queer, trans, non-binary and intersex people are often criminalized and stigmatized for being who we are, barring our access to public life and decision making spaces with safety as opposed to our heterosexual, cisgender and endosex counterparts. Right now, this is particularly prevalent because we are experiencing violent attacks and State repression against pro-women’s rights and pro-LGBTI rights movements. Thus, we must seek alliances with the broader human rights movements for them to empower, protect, support and practice inclusion of LGBTI people. On behalf of the LGBTIQ constituency, I want to make an appeal for us to go beyond the paradigm of ‘women’s participation’ so we can bring together all those who have historically been excluded from decision making processes across formal and informal spaces, even within women’s spaces. We need to encourage and enable a truly inclusive feminist leadership, creating space for diverse feminists to take their rightful place as leaders and decision makers in national, regional and international institutions, and reject exclusion towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, and non binary people. Understanding the specific needs and challenges of all women will only be possible with their voices in all spaces as this inclusion is the only way to ensure that no one is left behind. How will you and how are you working to understand and expand the practice of including the participation in public life of LGBTI people in particular? And how are you working to ensure that those historically marginalized are not left out or left behind?

Immediate and large-scale measures, often punitively backed by states to control the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with high stress on public services, are having disproportionate implications on LGBTI people with diverse SOGIESC. Current COVID-19 policies do not take into consideration the widespread vulnerability, transience, and homelessness among the LGBTI people. Under these circumstances in places where non-compliance to isolation policies are punishable, we also have less recourse against arrest, homophobic and transphobic violence, or harassment. These experiences of inequality and discrimination are compounded by disability, age, ethnicity/race, sex, indigenous or minority status, socioeconomic status and/or caste, language, religion or belief, political opinion, national origin, migration or situation of displacement, marital and/or maternal status, urban/rural location, health status, and property ownership.

Health: There is ample evidence of health disparities in the LGBTI population, such as higher rates of new HIV infection and of mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide. The criminalization and pathologisation of LGBT people have had a deep impact on public policy, legislation and jurisprudence. All of this is compounded by inadequate public healthcare systems, stigma, discrimination in accessing healthcare and by healthcare workers, lack of health insurance coverage, and other barriers to accessing health resources especially in countries under lockdown. This crisis highlights the fundamental need for universal healthcare, social protection and access to justice.

Increase in Violence: Containment policies have drastically increased experiences of domestic, family, and intimate partner violence as LGBTI people have been forced to isolate in hostile family homes, with no means to go elsewhere. There is also an increase in cyberbullying, online harassment, and hate speech against LGBTI people during the COVID-19 leading to targeted harassment of the community by the States and other actors. Surveillance and other digital technologies enacted to track COVID-19 carriers increase risks of infringing privacy and exacerbating stigma. This is worsened in countries where non-normative Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) are criminalized, preventing them from accessing justice or support for fear of persecution

Employment and financial security: Social distancing policies and economic shutdown means greater risks of food insecurity, poverty and homelessness for LGBTI community as they continue to face discrimination in accessing employment. They often find jobs in precarious and informal sectors and face barriers in accessing redress for discrimination, harassment and unfair termination. LGBTI sex workers are facing drastic impacts to their livelihoods and wellbeing, and are forced into unsafe situations in order to cope with severe financial instability. As governments invest in food security, economic stimulus and relief packages against the impacts of COVID-19, it is important these efforts first reach marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Intersectional realities: LGBTI asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons are experiencing this crisis in an acute way because of lack citizenship or legal status, access to information, and inability to practice safety measures against COVID-19. There is fear of mass transmission rates and deaths due to overcrowded camps, lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene, decent healthcare, and other inadequate living conditions. Border closures are preventing access to safety, while countries are scapegoating immigrants and refugees as vectors of the disease to implement hardlines migration policies or threaten refugee refoulement.

Funding: The current crisis and ensuing policies are impacting the ability of LGBTI community to carry out urgent action, organize, provide services to their communities, push for accountability and inclusion in multilateral fora and mechanisms, and enjoy financial sustainability. As a severely underfunded community we risk losing resources from individual donors affected by the economic upheaval of the crisis, and worse if governments and development agencies redirect capital and retract their current and future commitments. Such reallocations of resources would be devastating, would have large-scale ramifications on health and wellbeing, could eliminate community mobilization and activities, and could lead to greater rollbacks on the freedom, safety, agency, and human rights of LGBTI people.

A post pandemic world is not one where LGBTI people and organizations can revert to conducting business as usual. We see and feel the impact of this crisis on our community, on

our ability to survive, and on our future sustainability. Much time will be needed to heal and recover from this devastation. More than ever, we need support, strong commitments, and leadership from governments, philanthropic, institutional partners, UN agencies, and others, to help us rebuild, recuperate, and restore our ability to work towards a world of equal access and opportunities, free from violence and discrimination.