Session 2: “Opportunities and entry points for accelerated action in the COVID-19 era”
Statement LGBT*IQ+A Constituency of APRCEM

Speaker name: Matcha (and Ritambhara)

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 LGBT*IQ+A people with diverse SOGIESC\(^1\) (henceforth, LGBTI). 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 breast and cervical cancer, 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

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\(^1\) LGBT*IQ+A (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Intersex, Queer and Asexual) and SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression, and Sex Characteristics). Trans* is an umbrella term for transgender people, gender queer people, gender non-binary people, and people who do not conform to notions of gender assigned to them at birth/gender non-conforming people
of infringing privacy and exacerbating stigma. This is worsened in countries where non-normative 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 hardline 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.