

17 May 2019

**International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2019**

**Statement by The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth for**

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2019 marks the 70th anniversary of the formation of the Commonwealth as it is configured today, with old ties and new links enabling cooperation towards social, political and economic development which is both inclusive and sustainable. The theme for our 70th anniversary is ‘A Connected Commonwealth’, which celebrates our diverse family of nations and the opportunities we provide to connect and cooperate through far-reaching and deep-rooted networks of friendship and goodwill.

‘A Connected Commonwealth’ requires us to be forward looking and to advance the equality and dignity of everybody. Exclusion, discrimination and intolerance remain amongst the gravest challenges we must address, not only in the Commonwealth, but globally.

The theme for the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia this year, is justice and protection for all. The theme echoes the call to leave no one behind which is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There has been definitive progress over the last number of years among our member states in Asia, the Caribbean and Africa. Our approach has been to work with national level institutions such as parliaments, national human rights institutions, human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and faith leaders by harnessing their capabilities to advocate for and champion LGBTI equality and inclusion and progress the national dialogue.

Marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTI community, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and religious minorities, are disproportionately impacted by discrimination. In this regard, we recently held a stakeholder consultation with civil society partners, accredited organisations, as well as two UN Special Procedure mandate holders, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. We will be working to support both these mandates as we promote LGBTI equality and inclusion as part of our advocacy for full and inclusive implementation of the commitments made under the SDGs.

Our collective aspiration on this International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia 2019 must be to continue to promote the values of the Commonwealth Charter; to advocate for adherence to international human rights standards and obligations; and to work to ensure justice and protection for all persons, so that the SDGs become a reality and nobody is left behind.