



Press statement 17 May 2015

ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY CYGEN CONFERENCE ENDS WITH CALL FOR THE COMMONWEALTH TO FACE GENDER ISSUES HEAD-ON.

The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network meeting in Malta, sponsored by the Australian Government, has ended its pioneering conference in which young delegates from 22 Commonwealth countries attended to form a youth network for change. Convened by the Royal Commonwealth Society, the President of Malta HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca closed the conference today by saying not enough has been done to tackle gender equality in access to education, and that too many people face poverty through marginalisation, stigma and discrimination.

Youth Chair for the conference, John Loughton said:

“900 million people alive today were married as children, every minute a young woman is infected with HIV, 130 million women have suffered FGM and 92% of Commonwealth citizens live in a jurisdiction where expressing your sexuality to someone you choose to love is outlawed and criminalised. This is not a matter of gender rights, these are human rights.

Inaction and silence is not an option. Dear Governments, this is not good enough. We want to hold the Commonwealth to account...but also be its ally for change.”

The Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network conference also delivered a set of outcomes and objectives which will be expanded on over the coming months as the network prepares to feed its recommendations into the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) in Malta in November. The executive summary below is the starting point for the youth network which will grow organically on-line and through the delegates’ connections with each other and in their own communities.

“Shout when we must, constructively engage where we can, and listen when we should,” Loughton said.

The CYGEN outcomes Executive Summary is the start of the work to come by the new youth network:

**The Gender Agenda:
Youth Perspectives from across the Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN) is a youth-led advocacy group that works towards policy change that improves the lives of young people. The network held its inaugural meeting in Malta on 12-17 May 2015. This resultant outcome document is a rights-based policy paper constructed by experienced young leaders, advocates, researchers and campaigners, drawing on their range of grassroots experience, subject and policy expertise. Content was developed in thematic workshops, with individual delegates contributing in their area of specialism.

Discriminatory gender norms, rooted in gender inequality, are a central factor affecting the lives of young people in the Commonwealth and globally today. Young people are too often the victims of gender-based discrimination, prejudice and violence, yet they are central to forming solutions and

championing equality.

As the Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action expires in 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals emerge, which will set the development agenda for the next 15 years, there has never been a more critical time to advocate for improved policies on gender and equality issues. To date, youth voices on gender issues remain largely unheard in formal policy structures, a fact that this network aims to challenge.

This document focuses primarily on five thematic areas that are of key concern across the Commonwealth today: governance; child, early and forced marriage; sexual and reproductive health and rights; youth transitions; and sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Below are the “Gender Five” – the network’s priority policy recommendations, one from each of our five key themes.

1. All young people of the Commonwealth must have access to gender-inclusive, quality education with relevant curricula which prioritises holistic learning methods that prepare young people for decent fair work, equitable employment opportunities and entrepreneurship, transitioning to productive and resilient lives.
2. The right of all women, girls and young people from marginalised groups must be recognised in order to successfully influence decision making, to hold leaders to account, and enable them to be partners in peace and stability.
3. Commonwealth institutions must include an understanding of the needs of people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identities, gender expression and sex characteristics, developed in consultation with civil society, in the technical advice they provide to States in areas related to economic security such as education, employment and housing.
4. The Commonwealth Secretariat should commission a gender audit of all policies at the Commonwealth and national government levels for all member states, including for child marriage.
5. Every country should respect the right of all young people to make safe and informed sexual and reproductive health decisions by allocating appropriate health budget to develop a nationwide mobile application or hotline to disseminate youth-friendly information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, health care and services.

*The RCS today also recognises and supports the strong statement made by the Commonwealth Secretariat to mark International Day against Homophobia-transphobia-and-biphobia. It recognises such abuse is unacceptable: it robs millions of our fellow citizens of the right to live lives of dignity, undermining their mental and physical health, and sense of well-being. The statement also acknowledges the positive steps being taken by Commonwealth Countries on LGBT rights.

The statement can be found here:

<http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/international-day-against-homophobia-transphobia-and-biphobia>

BROADCASTERS, AGENCIES AND ONLINE VIDEO SITES

A free-to-use Video News Release featuring conference highlights is available for download below.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7XVgx5S_NZWcmJGSUVoRFk5UWM/view?usp=sharing

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

Audio: Dual channel (L- Interviews, grabs. R- Natural sound)

Contents:

- Overlay of outcome document being handed to President of Malta
- Speech from President of Malta
- Speech from John Loughton, Youth Chair of CYGEN
- Overlay of CYGEN delegates at Presidential Palace

NOTES TO EDITORS

The CYGEN Conference runs from 13-17 May at the Corinthia Hotel, St George's Bay, Malta. The Royal Commonwealth Society is the oldest civil society organisation in the Commonwealth, established in 1868 to uphold the value and values of the Commonwealth.

RCS Report on 'Hidden Violence in the Commonwealth' can be found at:

<https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/Summit-Booklet-Website.pdf>

RCS Report on 'Building a Constructive Commonwealth Approach to LGBT Rights at:

<https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/LGBTCitizenshipReport-130315-FINAL.pdf>

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