

Josh Paterson
Direct Line: 604-630-9752
Email: josh@bccla.org

Via Email

16 May 2014

Page 1/3

Hon. John Baird
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Office of the Minister
Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

Dear Minister,

**Re: State-sanctioned discrimination against LGBTQ+ people
abroad**

I am writing on behalf of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA). The BCCLA has long fought against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It is the BCCLA's deeply held conviction that queer rights are human rights. We write to you today on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia to ask for the government's continued vigilance on the issue of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people worldwide.

In recent months, as you know, there has been an increase in anti-LGBTQ+ actions and laws that are being propagated by governments in other countries. Such state promotion of hatred is a significant setback for the basic guarantees of human dignity and fundamental freedoms that all states are bound to observe under international law. They also are part of an alarming broader movement to suppress civil rights and freedoms for political purposes, not only for LGBTQ+ people, but for a whole

range of communities and human rights defenders. These actions demand an immediate and strong response by the Government of Canada.

Page 2/3

Countries such as Russia, Uganda, Jamaica, and Nigeria have enacted laws that criminalize homosexuality, and some countries have outlawed “pro-gay” behaviours that, in effect, make any public activism on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community illegal. In Russia, the “promotion of non-traditional relations,” which may be as simple as attending an LGBTQ+ event, can result in individuals being subject to fines totaling 100,000 rubles (approximately \$3,000 USD) and organizations may be fined 1 million rubles (\$30,000 USD). In Uganda, a practicing LGBTQ+ person cannot own a home without being considered to illegally own a brothel, punishable by seven years in prison. The very status of being a homosexual may be punishable by life imprisonment, and the “promotion, aiding or abetting” of homosexuality is punishable by up to seven years imprisonment – putting many in civil society or health organizations at risk.

These laws mean that some people’s very identities and existences are criminalized. They have resulted in the inability for LGBTQ+ individuals and allies to exercise their basic freedoms of assembly and association without fear of intense reprisal. The degradation of the inherent human worth of LGBTQ+ individuals by political leaders has resulted in significant violence.

The issue is literally a matter of life or death; consensual sex between same-sexed adults remains punishable by death in some countries, and LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately the victims of hate crimes and ongoing violence throughout the world. This discrimination, promoted by states, should not be tolerated by members of the global community.

The BCCLA welcomes your public denunciation of the enactment of discriminatory laws against LGBTQ+ people. It is imperative that Canada takes a strong stance against state promotion of hatred.. We ask for you to continue to speak loudly and publicly with the voice of the Government of Canada against the adoption of anti-LGBTQ+ laws, and to act in the international sphere to defend the rights of LGBTQ+ people worldwide. States must not be able to persecute sexual minorities, or any other group.

Page 3/3

We would welcome this being made an explicit priority in Canada's foreign policy, and Canada working both individually and collectively with like-minded states towards the goal of ending this legally codified hatred. We would also welcome Canada supporting civil society organizations that are working on the ground to challenge such discrimination and to serve LGBTQ+ populations. In addition, we call on the Government of Canada to do its utmost to provide protection to refugee claimants who flee their countries of origin as a result of persecution on the basis of sexual identity (as, of course, it is Canada's moral and international legal obligation to assist all refugee claimants who seek our protection).

We look forward to your reply and to the Canadian government's continued commitment to defending fundamental human rights for LGBTQ+ throughout the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josh Paterson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Josh Paterson
Executive Director