

Dear Mr. Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General,

## Over 75 countries around the world criminalise people on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In 10 of those countries people can be sentenced to death or life behind bars.

40 of the countries that make it a crime to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) are members of the Commonwealth. In an intergovernmental organisation that promotes the core values of equality and non-discrimination, this is unacceptable.

Your previous calls for equality and non-discrimination across the Commonwealth and your strong statement on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in May 2015 are recognised as important efforts in the global fight against the persecution of LGBT people.

Many Commonwealth citizens continue to face appalling discrimination and violence, purely because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Criminalisation only serves to further drive and deepen this persecution. It also undermines the HIV response amongst LGBT people.

Criminalisation of LGBT people is a barrier that prevents people getting the HIV services and healthcare they need. It will be impossible to end AIDS until all people – regardless of their identity or sexuality – can get access to health services and treatment.

Efforts need to be redoubled to turn the tide of apathy among Commonwealth nations on the persecution of people on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We cannot let them stay silent on this issue. People's lives are at risk.

We call on your leadership to:

- Urge Commonwealth leaders to repeal discriminatory laws that impede the effective response of Commonwealth countries to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Ensure the Commonwealth Secretariat is equipped to assist those states ready for law reform.
- Assist member states in meeting their international obligations and commitments under the Commonwealth Charter to ensure equality for all and opposing all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds.
- Pass the baton to your successor so the new Secretary-General prioritises this work.

Let's keep the pressure on. We refuse to stand by and watch innocent people be labelled criminals. No one should be a criminal for who they are and who they love.

[Signatures will be added here]