



LESBIANS, GAYS AND BISEXUALS OF BOTSWANA

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**PRESS RELEASE: 2019 IDAHOT**

To: All Media Houses

From: The Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana - LEGABIBO

Date: 10 May 2019

**RE: 2019 International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia – IDAHOT**

On Friday, 17 May 2019, LEGABIBO will join the global community to commemorate the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia – IDAHOT. IDAHOT was created in 2004 to draw the attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexuals, transgender, intersex, queer – LGBTIQ people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics. The date of May 17th was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization’s decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

The Day represents a major global annual landmark to draw the attention of decision makers, the media, the public, corporations, opinion leaders, local authorities, etc. to the alarming situation faced by people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics.

LEGABIBO has always commemorated IDAHOT in Botswana. This year, we intend to do the same. This year’s theme is “Justice and Protection for All”. The theme comes at an opportune time in Botswana where several advances have been made to ensure the protection and socio-inclusion of LGBTIQ persons in the society.

LEGABIBO commends the Government of Botswana, partners and allies in following a steady trajectory to protect the rights of sexual and gender minority persons and promoting inclusion for all;

- In 2010, parliament of Botswana amended the Employment Act by prohibiting employment termination based on sexual.
- The Second National Strategic Framework for HIV and Aids (2010 – 2016), specified that a guiding principle of the national response to HIV is upholding human rights by “promoting dignity, non-discrimination and welfare of all people, whether infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and ensuring equal access to health and social support services regardless of [...] sexual orientation. The Third National Strategic Framework (2019 - 2023) has also identified key populations as one of their priority areas for HIV intervention. Furthermore, through the PEPFAR project, Botswana is piloting the implementation of an HIV prevention project called PrEP for the key populations. All these mark progress towards health justice.

*PROTECT. PROMOTE. DEFEND.*

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- In 2016, the government of Botswana successfully registered us as Botswana's first LGBTIQ human rights group, thus, granting LGBTIQ persons enjoyment of their fundamental right specifically freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- In June 2018, LEGABIBO successfully co-hosted the Pan Africa ILGA Regional Conference in Gaborone. This saw over 300 LGBTIQ human rights activists descending into Botswana. The conference provided an opportunity for visitors to explore and tour Botswana and contribute to the economy of the country.
- In November 2018, when launching the 16 Days of Activism against Violence on Women and Children, His Excellency President Mokgweetsi E. Masisi explicitly called for protection of LGBTI individuals, stating that *"There are also many people of same-sex relationships in this country, who have been violated and have also suffered in silence for fear of being discriminated. Just like other citizens, they deserve to have their rights protected"*.
- In March 2019, Member of Parliament for Sefhare Ramokgonami, Hon. Dorcas Makgatho has urged parliament of Botswana to allow transgender people to change their gender markers without going through the courts. The Minister told parliament that transgender people are being mistreated by government for something they do not have a control over.
- The ongoing case of LM vs. the Attorney General of Botswana, and LEGABIBO as Amicus Curiae, seeks to challenge the constitutionality of Sections 164 (a) and (c), 165 and 167 of the Botswana Penal Code. LEGABIBO argues that criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts has an impact on public perception and attitudes towards LGBTI persons. It is an impediment towards access to health care, justice and safety, human rights and dignity and fuels violence and perpetuates stigma and discrimination towards LGBTI persons in Botswana. The verdict is set for 11 June 2019.

For LGBTIQ in Botswana, the subjects of equal justice and protection cannot be understated. Without inclusive institutional support, sexual minorities in Botswana are disproportionately less likely to seek out health, police or other government services to which they are entitled due to real or perceived stigma, severely impacting the community's health, safety, and security.

LEGABIBO seeks to call upon the Government of Botswana, law authorities, health care workers, human rights organisations, community leaders and the public to ensure the inclusion and protection of LGBTIQ person, to actively defend the rights and wellbeing and at the same time provide safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTIQ.

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