

The Human Rights Conference – Sydney WorldPride 2023

Gay Caucus Report

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Overview:

The following report outlines the reflections and work completed by participants of the 'Gay Caucus' on 28 February as a part of the pre-caucusing that occurred prior to the start of Sydney WorldPride Human Rights Conference 2023.

The facilitators for this session were Timothy Wark – Manager, Community Partnerships & Population Programs and Harrison Sarasola – Team Leader, Peer Education Programs - [ACON](#).

The primary goals of this caucus was to provide a safe space for delegates from diverse backgrounds and experiences to gather, connect, build relationships and to engage in conversations with their peers globally.

Participants attending the Gay Caucus worked in both small and larger groups to discuss, establish and record their reflections, ideas, and recommendations across a few key topics:

- Intersectional Approaches to human rights.
- Identified shared priorities/goals which further the LGBTQIA+ Human Rights movement globally.
- Threats to progress.
- Opportunities for collective action.

Intersectional approaches to LGBTQIA+ human rights:

Our caucus begun by discussing and defining what LGBTQIA+ human rights were within the context of our own lived experiences and within the global, regional, and local contexts each of the caucus operated within both professionally and as LGBTQIA+ community members.

This reflection led to the caucus discussing the intersectional and nuanced nature of LGBTQIA+ human rights before concluding that any attempt to progress LGTBQIA+ human rights globally must understand and respond to the specific intersectional experiences and needs of those the movement is seeking to support.

By engaging in this process of reflection and sharing of our experiences within the caucus, it became apparent that the ability for this caucus to speak broadly on a range of issues impacting the human rights movement and the broader experiences of LGBTQIA+ was limited, as several voices were missing from our conversation.

Another conclusion of importance was that sexuality is only one aspect of a person's identity and that for us to progress a global LGBTQIA+ human rights agenda which is built on equity, we must first reflect on who's voice is missing from the conversation, understand why their voice is missing and make every effort to ensure that the barriers which prevent that person from leading the conversation are removed. Examples of these barriers were discrimination due to race, ethnicity, class, religious status, lack of funding and geographic challenges.

Other barriers which the caucus wanted addressed, were the various barriers which existed for delegates to attend the conference, let alone the pre-caucusing.

These barriers consisted of costs associated with attendance (travel, accommodation, visas etc), cost of attendance (which could climb above \$1000), safety and ability to travel, the group also discussed other political and organisational barriers to accessing the conference.

When we consider the centrality of intersectional approaches to the progression of LGBTQ human rights, it's essential for any conference seeking to progress efforts within a global setting to ensure that as many, if not all of these barriers to access are either eliminated or heavily minimized so that we are able to have everyone at the table, not just those from affluent countries with the means and political good will to send delegates.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that future caucus are not run at the same time. This meant that for several participants they were required to choose which aspect of identity was the most important to them and only attend that caucus. Given that so many of our community have experiences across the intersections of identity, this structural decision prevented meaningful involvement and should be avoided in future conferences.
- Future conferences should aim to reduce the financial and geographical inequities faced by delegates who would otherwise not be able to attend the conference and pre-caucus. We would suggest that a process be in place to prioritise First Nations Peoples, People of Colour and other LGTBQIA+ community members who may face significant fiscal and political challenges to attend the conference.
- Ensure that future conferences prioritise the most marginalised within our communities are given priority access to attendance and to the speaking and presenting platforms.
- Any attempt to progress the global LGBTQIA+ Human Rights agenda without centering the voices of the most marginalised and impacted within our communities globally will prevent global progress on LGBTQIA+ rights from occurring.

Identified shared priorities/goals which further the LGBTQIA+ Human Rights movement globally:

We had many participants in our caucus share that they were engaged in work for either and AIDS council, HIV Health sector worker or working within LGBTQ health specifically. This meant that our caucus identified several shared priorities and goals which centred predominantly around the issues of the global HIV epidemic and stigma associated with being LGBTQIA+ or a person living with HIV. As a result, we constructed a number of shared priorities/goals which this caucus believes would further the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people globally, these were:

- Acknowledge and own that progress around LGBTQIA+ human rights have been lopsided and often linked to the wealth and privilege obtained through colonisation and other inequities. Thus, to ensure equity, it's important that consider in what ways we can share these resources and privileges with one another.

- Ensure that all policy, strategy, and progress is led and directed by the LGBTQIA+ people who are most impacted by changes and that this is done in a culturally appropriate and intersectional ways. Nothing about us, without us.
- Continue to fight for the global decriminalisation of homosexuality.
- Further the rights of LGBTQIA+ people globally.
- Ensure that global health bodies and government health bodies are prioritising and focusing on removing the numerous barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ people globally when it comes to accessing safe, inclusive, and effective sexual and general health care.
- Established countries with greater resources should seek to platform the experiences, needs and voices of the most marginal voices in our communities.
- Continued focus needs to be given to ending HIV transmission globally.
- Effort needs to be directed at addressing the stigma associated with living with HIV, including media representation and portrayal of what it means to live with HIV. Greater attention and pressure need to be applied to media outlets perpetuating stigmatising and outdated views to ensure that hateful or stigmatising propaganda aren't going unchallenged.
- Greater efforts need to be made to increase global awareness about the effectiveness of U=U or effective treatments for HIV.
- Faith and spirituality are for many LGBTQIA+ people an inalienable aspect of self, thus it's important that greater effort is made globally between communities of faith, LGBTQIA+ advocates and allies to build stronger understanding and partnerships.

Threats to progress:

The caucus identified several threats to the successful progression of each of the above potential goals for furthering the human rights of LGBTQIA people. These threats ranged from structural, such as living in a country with a hostile socio-political climate where LGBTQIA+ rights are not able to be freely discussed without retribution or incarceration, through to financial barriers, such as consistent and long-term funding to progress this work.

Categorized, key threats to progress identified by the caucus were:

- **Structural:** systems of government, education systems, funding structures, structural discrimination. Un-equal distribution of resources due to racist systems/colonial systems.
- **Legal:** Decriminalisation has not yet occurred globally; due to this we still see our community criminalized and incarcerated (or worse) due to their sexuality or experiences of gender. Before we can progress other human rights issues, we must seek to decriminalise homosexuality and repeal laws that seek to erase LGBTQIA+ people and their rights.

- **Societal:** attitudes/discourse around LGBTQIA+ rights overwhelmingly negative, reinforced by media and other societal elements.
- **Political:** LGBTQIA+ people (particularly trans people) face targeted efforts to limit, remove or increase the difficulty to access safe, affordable, and effective healthcare. LGBTQIA+ people continue to be used as a political scapegoat.
- **Environmental:** Global warming will further prevent LGBTQIA+ people living within coastal and island locations from experiencing health – a basic human right.
- **Funding and Resources:** Lack of long-term funding allocated to this work, often skills and staff are in short supply. Resourcing for larger scale work not always provided.
- **Anti-LGBTQIA+ Lobbyists:** Increased mobilisation of anti LGBTQIA+ groups seeking to change laws and repeal progress made by LGBTQIA+ people to date.
- **Community Division:** The caucus was concerned about a general apathy developing from parts of our community which have already obtained the human rights that they have historically sought.
- **Inequity:** Resourcing and support isn't reaching those with greatest need; often this is due to the inequitable distribution and re-distribution of resources. First Nations, indigenous and aboriginal people, people of colour, people with disability, trans and gender diverse people, women, and many other marginalised communities within the LGBTQIA+ community are not able to experience good health and many other of their human rights.
- **Anti-LGBTQ Religious/faith organisations:** Religious bodies and communities of faith who are hostile to our communities represent a growing threat to the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people. Recent developments in the US and even within Australia (Melbourne TERF and Neo Nazi demonstrations) highlight this risk.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the adoption of an anti-racism and intersectional approach to all aspects of the conference and the work of delegates more broadly. This process should occur at the individual, structural, organisational and society levels respectively. If delegates are encouraged to identify and address internal bias, we can hopefully avoid reinforcing or replicating these injustices. This caucus encourages the adoption of both an anti-racism approach and an intersectional approach to this conference and future conferences and recommends that support and training/resources be provided to delegates to support this learning process.
- The caucus recommended that time and resources be devoted to assisting delegates who are working to repeal criminalisation laws and laws which target the health and human rights of LGBTQIA+ people. Global support, from delegates who have experienced successes

in similar contexts could prove invaluable in the fight for greater global equity for our communities.

- Our caucus discussed the importance of global messaging to combat anti-LGBTQ lobbying. We encourage delegates to network and explore potential opportunities to combine resources and messaging to reach broader audiences through conventional and emerging media.
- This caucus wanted this conference and subsequent work to provide delegates with the skills, strategies, and techniques that are required to mobilise both the LGBTQIA+ community but also the broader community in support of LGBTQIA+ people and the furthering of our human rights. Being a minority community, it's critical that we can mobilise not only our own community but the broader community too. To this end, this caucus would like delegates to be given access to clear, effective strategies and skills to combat the rising wave of anti LGBTQIA+ sentiment and the targeted efforts of anti-LGBTQIA+ actors – such as lobbyists, organisations, political parties and so on. We would also recommend creating clear pathways for delegates and their representative organisations to stay connected.
- The sharing of funding and resources is possible, and this caucus recommends that all organisations seeking to further LGBTQIA+ rights locally, also look to how they can contribute to LGBTQIA+ rights globally also.
- The caucus also recommended that time, effort, and concerted effort be placed on communicating and sharing the history of inequity experienced globally. Chiefly, this caucus felt that without a solid understanding of how inequity was constructed, we aren't well positioned to both dismantle and prevent a repeat of history. This caucus recommends that truth telling and historic decisions which have led to the inequity experienced by many in our communities is openly discussed, platformed and responded to by this and future conferences.

Opportunities for collective action:

This caucus identified that a great many of the challenges facing the future progression of LGBTQIA+ human rights are not novel. Often these threats to progress have been overcome by delegates previously and much could be gained through the process of collaboration and collective action.

The caucus identified the following opportunities for collective action to occur:

- A commitment from all delegates, to continue to centre the voices of First Nations people within the work each of us do and within this and future conferences and within our professional and personal capacities also.
- Ensure that self-determination and community led approaches and wisdom are centred and amplified by conference organisers and employed by delegates in the work which they perform.

- Delegates bring their lived, personal, and professional experiences to the conference forum. This experience is invaluable and presents a unique opportunity for delegates to share this with one another and potentially overcome challenges collaboratively.
- There is scope for many of the delegates from each of the organisations present to help facilitate conversations which allow for the easier sharing of physical and financial resources. This caucus would like to see greater collaboration and the sharing of resources globally to assist delegates and organisations needing of these resources.
- Delegates discussed the importance of international pressure in creating the political climate needed for changes to LGBTQIA+ human rights in their country of origin. This caucus asks delegates to explore collaboratively the leveraging and mobilisation of political networks to apply global political pressure on leaders who aren't supporting LGBTQIA+ human rights.

Recommendations

This caucus recommends the creation of:

- a charter or strategic set of goals, through consultation with previous and current attending delegates. The purpose of this guiding document would be to seek material and measurable commitments to a criterion of collective goals prior to, during and after the conference. These goals could be fiscally focused or focus on sharing of critical research/resources/knowledge. Chiefly contributions made should be provided to delegates experiencing the greatest need.
- more opportunities for entry level and frontline delegates to communicate their needs, concerns, and ideas to create change to the more senior delegates in attendance. This caucus sees an opportunity for decision makers to then be brought together and commits be made to actioning and creating the change suggested by community members and frontline staff through this original consultation process.
- smaller more concentrated sessions designed to upskill delegates present in key health promotion and human rights advocacy skills. These sessions should be tailored to the needs of the delegates in attendance and could be achieved through some need's identification at the time of registration.

Closing statement from facilitators:

Recently we have seen numerous new and ongoing threats to the further progression of LGBTQIA+ rights globally. These threats have historic roots in colonisation and embedded structures which perpetuate racism and lead to enormous inequality within the LGBTQIA+'s communities experience of basic human rights. Now more than ever, it's important that platforms like the human rights conference seek to act beyond the scope of gathering place for some of the worlds LGBTQIA+ community, rather, future conferences should seek to create experiences and opportunities for

delegates to actively create meaningful and community-led change for LGBTQIA+ people globally. The future is bright if we can, as a global community, rally and support one another to ensure that the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people are secured and furthered.