

2023 Sydney WorldPride - Human Rights Conference - POC Caucus

28th February 10am to 12.30pm

Held at Aerial UTS Function Centre, Building 10, Level 7/235 Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007, Australia
Chaired by: Dr Judy Tang, Board director, Victorian Pride Centre; Commissioner, Victorian Multicultural Commission; and Director, Invictus Health

The purpose of the POC (People of Colour) Caucus was to provide a space to discuss the issues, strengths, experiences, thoughts and possible actions that could be taken to further equality and the human rights of multicultural LGBTIQ+ people and communities.

The following five topics were uncovered and discussed:

1. Impact of western colonialism
2. Funding for multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ organisations
3. Systemic barriers
4. The need to face racism
5. Feedback for Interpride and WorldPride regarding the Human Rights Conference (HRC)

Impact of western colonialism

Colonialism has invaded and influenced our language around LGBTIQ+, as well as the frameworks that perpetuate what is thought to be considered an “appropriate” way to advocate and demonstrate LGBTIQ+ rights and equality.

There have been many terms to describe the diversities of sexualities and genders in countries and cultures prior to western colonisation, for example, fa'afafine and fa'afatama in Samoan culture.

The term “LGBTIQ+” is a western term, and the caucus saw value in reclaiming language around gender and sexuality from other cultures and countries, as a way to truly be inclusive and embracing diversity within the LGBTIQ+ movement. Additionally, pre-colonial language and descriptors can also be linked to one's spirituality and connection to land, and this connected is lost if we just focus on western colonial terminology.

The caucus also discussed the negative pervasive impacts on western colonialism, including western religiosity that historically persecuted gender and sexually diverse people in non-western countries and cultures, as well as turning communities within those cultures against their own people.

The caucus raised a concern of the rise of neo-colonialism in LGBTIQ+ advocacy, providing the example of international aid/funding being removed if a country is deemed anti-LGBTIQ+, or if the country does not prioritise what the funding nation requests to be prioritised. For example, a funding nation pushes for gender equality to be actioned by organisations in developing nations. However, the organisations must respond to the needs of the communities they service who have

highlighted the urgent need to focus on housing. The funding nation withdraws their funding, and communities now are left without support for housing. This is extremely dangerous and counterproductive to improving LGBTIQ+ equality, as often then, local communities are left with the impression that “because of LGBTIQ+ people, your funding is taken away”.

Finally, many people of colour do not consider themselves people of colour - a Filipino person who has grown up and lives in the Philippines is a Filipino person there - they do not think of themselves as “POC”. This term only arises once they move to a western country (and in doing so, become “othered”).

Funding for multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ organisations

The caucus spoke of the lack of equitable access to funding. Often, funders provide monies and support to large organisations, who may in turn only allocate a smaller portion of funding to multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ projects.

Small grass-roots organisations whose sole focus is for multicultural / POC LGBTIQ+ lack the capacity to write and apply for grants. An additional example is provided of larger organisations that can charge \$100,000 for a workshop on POC diversity, compared to smaller organisations who are pushed to accept \$20,000 to provide the same quality workshop and training.

This perpetuates a system where multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ needs are continually minoritised and minimalised.

Further, the lack of funding means that many multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ projects compete for the same money, leading to lateral violence between our multicultural and/or LGBTIQ+ communities. A top-down approach to address this funding challenge could be to ensure large organisations are required to engage with smaller grassroots organisations on projects before funding is granted.

Systemic barriers

The caucus highlighted a series of systemic barriers that impede multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ equality. This includes the lack of community accountability when it comes to providing adequate trauma-informed practices in community services (a possible action to address this could be the development of a code of conduct for community services).

There is often a deficit and blaming focus on why multicultural/POC LGBTIQ+ equality and accessibility is harder to achieve, with reasons such as “there was a language barrier” to “those communities have stigma”. This takes away the agency and perpetuates systemic barriers - why not take the perspective that those services did not provide translators and other in-language support? That no culturally appropriate engagement was considered in their communications planning?

The need to face racism

The caucus highlighted their experience of witnessing non-POC listening to POC stories to feel empathy for people of colour, but stopping short of providing tangible support and behaving defensively when the topic of racism is mentioned.

It is clear that many non-POC actively avoid using the terms “racist” and “racism”, perhaps not wanting to feel the guilt and burden of having to unlearn life long habits and thought patterns that have served them well in colonised societies. Unfortunately, avoiding the term does not erase its existence.

Indeed, the caucus noted only one use of the term “racism” in the Sydney WorldPride 2023 Human Rights Conference. To live free from racism is a fundamental human right, and it should be directly faced and addressed in spaces such as the Human Rights Conference.

Feedback for Interpride and WorldPride regarding the Human Rights Conference (HRC)

The POC Caucus provided the following feedback:

- There were a series of pre-conference caucuses - from the gay caucus, to the disability caucus, to the bisexual caucus, and the POC caucus. Many of these caucuses were held concurrently - erasing the intersectionality of many (if not all) of our lives. For example, someone who is a gay cis-gendered person of colour with a disability, had to choose which aspect of himself took priority to attend a caucus - he could not attend both the gay or POC caucus.
- For a world conference, there seemed limited discussion on worldly topics - including the topics of racism, and refugee and asylum seekers. There is a concern that this perpetuates the perspective that LGBTIQ+ is a “white” construct which makes LGBTIQ+ movements in other countries more difficult.
- There was limited to no support for VISA applications from international attendees - this locks out a vast majority of possible delegates to the HRC, which was marketed as a global conference. It may be of use to connect with ILGA.org, who hold world conferences bi-annually and learn how they support international delegates in attaining VISAs and travelling to other countries. The POC Caucus noted that ILGA world provided a 120-page booklet, one-to-one support and communication, and list of emergency numbers. Future HRC must ensure adequate funding is allocated to supporting and encouraging attendance from international delegates.
- The POC caucus recommended that Interpride and/or HRC make and share their material steps to show they have made sufficient efforts to include the “world” in “worldpride” - are there sufficient language support? Is there sufficient translated material? A racial equity checklist could be considered.

Closing remarks

It is important to be mindful of having a “saviour mentality” when it comes of LGBTIQ+ rights and equality. Working with other nations and cultures should be done by connecting with local communities and people, and being mindful of one’s own privileges and how that colours our biases and perspectives. It is imperative that co-design and co-production occur throughout any fight for LGBTIQ+ equality and rights.

—> do we want to put our names and orgs down?