



CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

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CAISO Says the Reality of LGBTQI+ People’s Lived Experiences Cannot Be Wished Away

During his, now infamous, inaugural speech on 20th January 2025, Donald Trump said, “As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders: male and female.” The eight words, “there are only two genders: male and female” have set off a firestorm of media interest in all things LGBTQI+ and prompted daily phone calls from reporters about the perceived impact of this directive on LGBTQI+ organisations in Trinidad and Tobago.

To say that it is a dangerous and scary time for gender non-conforming, non-binary, and transgender people in Trinidad and Tobago (and globally) is an understatement. These words are being used to attempt to invalidate the lived experiences of trans, gender-non-conforming, and intersex people – as well as LGBTQI+ communities broadly. But the reality is that no statement, no policy or law, and no insisting on binary definitions of sex and gender, can make gender and sexual diversity go away.

We are concerned about how this statement might lead or encourage our local political leaders to adopt a similar position, without even considering the views of citizens or the ramifications for vulnerable and marginalised communities. And we are concerned that religious leaders will use this to fuel existing conservative beliefs about gender and sexuality. It is vital that our leaders – political and religious – remember that every person has a right to exist and “the right to equal protection of the law and equality before the law.”

The social and political landscape was already wrought with gender panic before this statement, particularly given the rise in conservative anti-gender and anti-rights movements, globally, over the last few years. These movements have fuelled backlash against human rights, sexual and reproductive rights, and social justice movements and attacks on marginalised people and communities – from LGBTQI+ people to migrants to Black, Brown, and Indigenous people (especially in the U.S. and Europe). These are dangerous and scary times for many marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Locally, we manage a complex legal and political landscape regarding rights and protection for LGBTQI+ people (there are no explicit protections). This is also the case for other marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. We also endure a troubling landscape of limited access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. Moreover, it is also the case that access to justice, healthcare, and social services for working-class people remains onerous – and even more so for working-class LGBTQI+ people.

CAISO has been collecting data on human rights violations and publishing related insights for three years through our Wholeness and Justice Programme. Each year, we have analysed the pervasiveness of discrimination. Most recently, in the [2023 Insights Report](#), we documented how the



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State fails to provide equitable provision of services for care, support, protection, and redress to LGBTQI+ people, particularly working-class people. This hinders the enjoyment and fulfilment of the human rights of many LGBTQI+ people, and members of other marginalised communities, in Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, the report reveals that discrimination and harassment affect LGBTQI+ people's quality of life, as well as their access to safe housing, health services, proper policing, and gainful employment.

Imagine what it must feel like to be unaffirmed and alone in the world. Consider, for a moment, those citizens and residents being 'left behind' with less rights and no protection based on sexual orientation or gender identity – people who are our children, students, employees, relatives and friends — all left behind. Far too many LGBTQI people have reported bullying, disrespect, hate crimes, and intolerance from all institutions. The stakes are high. Every time policymakers and politicians deny the reality of gender and sexual diversity, they put real lives at risk. This is no hyperbole. It is a documented fact.

The surge in anti-trans violence and intolerance correlates directly with anti-trans rhetoric and policies. The lived experience of one privileged member of a community is an unreliable testimony to the lived experience of the whole community. We must remain vigilant against the rolling back of any human rights gains and collectively hold the line to demand equity and justice for all as we plan our next steps forward.

Furthermore, trans and non-binary people are not abstract concepts to be debated in political arenas or reduced to talking points about pronouns. We are the people in your neighbourhoods: your children, siblings, entertainers, teachers, doctors, first responders. We are tax-paying citizens who belong to, and raise families, and contribute to our communities. Our existence is not theoretical, neither is our humanity negotiable or up for debate.

It is also a grim time for academics and researchers in the interdisciplinary field of gender studies. The fallout from one high-handed executive order attempts to dismiss 40+ years of academic insight. It is vital to understand that the field of gender studies (globally and regionally) has informed our national and regional efforts to promote gender and sexual equality and justice and to combat discrimination against marginalised groups.

The reality of people's lived experiences cannot be wished away. Queer, trans, intersex, and gender-non-conforming people have always existed, and will always exist. In Trinidad and Tobago, there are no meaningful protections, in law, for LGBTQI+ people and absolutely NO healthcare that affirms gender identity nor any acknowledgement of intersex people. But we continue to fight for LGBTQI+ rights and dignity, call for justice, inclusion, and protection, and offer support to our community members.

CAISO stands in solidarity with LGBTQI+ organisations in the USA who have their work cut out for them to safeguard and sustain their communities. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, every day should be an opportunity to live up to and create policy according to the words of our national anthem, "here every creed and race finds an equal place." Our government has the duty and responsibility to act in alignment with the core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - non-discrimination, substantive equality, and state obligation. Our government also has a duty to respond to and follow through on recommendations



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made in each Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of this country's human rights record since 2011, especially to end legal discrimination allowed in the Equal Opportunity Act that explicitly excludes sexual orientation. CAISO has called for this amendment and other protections from discrimination for over a decade.

CAISO stands ready and will continue to support LGBTQI+ people, especially gender-non-conforming, non-binary, and trans community members, and to advocate for LGBTQI+ rights, protection, and inclusion. CAISO's Wholeness and Justice Programme responds to violations experienced by LGBTQI+ people living in Trinidad and Tobago and offers legal, clinical, and wholeness development services.

We have just begun our fifth year of service provision to, and evidence-based advocacy on behalf of, LGBTQI+ nationals and residents, through our Insights reports, research publications, and educational materials. Our work continues. LGBTQI+ persons who have experienced a violation, or who need help determining same, may contact the programme for legal and psychosocial support via phone at **868-28-CAISO (282-2476)** or via email at wholenessandjustice@caisott.org.

Above all, CAISO believes in an inclusive future for Trinidad and Tobago. We remain steadfast in our vision and mission to ensure wholeness, justice and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities, by developing analysis, alliances and advocacy. And we will continue to provide support and advocate for a more just society and world.

CAISO RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS

- [Annual Reports 2021 2022 2023](#)
- [Beyond Decriminalisation: Policy Paper on Laws & LGBTQI+ Inclusion and Protection \(2023\)](#)
- [HIV Toolkit for LGBTQI+ Community \(2022\)](#)
- [Insights from Wholeness and Justice \(2020-2021; 2022; 2023\)](#)
- [Model LGBTQI+ Workplace Policy \(2021\)](#) and [Training Packages](#)
- [Navigating the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service as an LGBTQI+ Person](#)
- [Ready, Set, Know: Social Services Navigation Guide for LGBTQI+ People in Trinidad and Tobago \(2023\)](#)
- [Rise Together: Educate to Empower \(2023\)](#)
- [Rise Up: Educate to Empower; a Guide for LGBTQI+ Youth \(2023\)](#)

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