



CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

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IDAHOBIT 2026 Media Statement - *Theme: The Heart of Democracy* CAISO's Wholeness and Justice Insights

In commemoration of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on 17 May, **CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** shared key findings of its *Insights from Wholeness and Justice Report* at a media conference at the Kapok Hotel, last Tuesday (12 May).

The organisation also launched “Growing Spaces: Building Safe and Sustainable Communities for LGBTQI+ People in Trinidad and Tobago” – a human rights project funded by the European Union. The project builds upon CAISO's Wholeness & Justice Programme, seeking to empower LGBTQI+ community members through holistic, supportive, and sustainable resources that address immediate needs and foster long-term resilience, wellbeing, and self-advocacy. “Growing Spaces” is a response to the needs of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago that emerge from their inequality, marginalisation, and lack of legal and social protections.

During the event, CAISO presented an overview of the *2025 Insights Report*, based on the fifth year of providing clinical, legal, and wholeness development services to Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities. CAISO's annual *Insights Report* provides data on service provision and community interventions, discusses key findings, analyses problems presented by clients, and offers policy recommendations based on client and community engagement. The Report is now available for public download on CAISO's website (caisott.org).

CAISO's Wholeness & Justice Programme offers free, clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions to members of the LGBTQI+ community who experience a violation. Interventions seek to enable healing and resilience, with a focus on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming and intersex people. In 2025, the Programme completed intakes with 35 people, enlisted 28 new clients, and continued services with 27 clients from 2024. This brings the total number of intakes to the Programme, since its December 2020 launch, to 208 LGBTQI+ people.

Key insights from the Report are informed by the cumulative experiences of clients, knowledge garnered through engagement with the wider LGBTQI+ community in Trinidad & Tobago, and related interventions by the Wholeness & Justice Programme. Of significance to this year's *Insights Report* was the Court of Appeal's decision in March, to overturn the landmark 2018 High Court ruling in *Jones v Attorney General* of Trinidad and Tobago, decriminalising consensual, same-sex intimacy. To LGBTQI+ citizens, the latest ruling echoed the longtime position of the State, NOT to recognise, include or protect their human rights. Based on our 2025 caseload, we have found the following key insights:

- 1) **The breakdown and unreliability of national social services constrained the Programme's ability to effectively support clients.** Clients frequently report feeling excluded from national social services, even when they have a clear and legitimate need. Rigid eligibility criteria (such as the requirement for a permanent address), overly bureaucratic processes, and restrictive thresholds for assistance, inhibit access to services. LGBTQI+ clients seeking public mental health care say they often receive



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medication without accompanying psychosocial support, because practitioners are ill-equipped to address the issues they face. These gaps in the State's provision of inclusive, accessible, and responsive social protections put sustained pressure on the Programme's resource capacity, limiting the ability to provide effective and sustainable support.

- 2) **Global and geopolitical dynamics undermine LGBTQI+ people's sense of safety and constrain our prospects for legal recognition and protection in Trinidad and Tobago.** Notable shifts in global power and governance in 2025 intensified polarisation on issues of gender and sexuality, compromising the community's sense of safety and confidence. Two local developments reinforced the feeling that both domestic and international safeguards for LGBTQI+ rights were weakening: the recriminalisation of consensual same-sex intimacy via the Appeal Court's ruling in March; and the closure of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Trinidad and Tobago in August (due to global funding shortfalls) at a time when migrant clients were experiencing heightened vulnerability.
- 3) **Weak social support networks and limited meaningful interpersonal connections hinder LGBTQI+ individuals' engagement with systems for redress in Trinidad and Tobago.** At-risk LGBTQI+ people whose family and interpersonal relationships are often characterised by a lack of acceptance, rejection and violence tend to feel isolated, unstable and unsafe. They are also less likely to report abuse and navigate complex legal and administrative systems for redress or support.
- 4) **Social displacement and housing instability undermine safety, limit access to stable, affirming living conditions for LGBTQI+ individuals, and increase their susceptibility to exploitation.** Access to safe, stable and affirming housing remains a critical challenge for LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, with social displacement being both cause and consequence of broader vulnerability. For at-risk LGBTQI+ people, the intersection of economic insecurity, unsafe housing, and exploitative labour practices, undermines their personal safety, restricts the potential of pathways for redress, and affects their ability to establish stable and dignified lives.
- 5) **Identity affirming name changes strengthen LGBTQI+ individuals' confidence and capacity to navigate administrative and social systems.** In the absence of legal gender recognition in Trinidad and Tobago, obtaining a legal name that reflects one's gender identity has emerged as a critical pathway for gender-diverse clients to affirm their sense of self and personal dignity. Clients who have completed deed poll applications to change their names say that the ability to present consistent identification across different settings reduces anxiety and increases confidence in engaging with formal, public systems.

These insights highlight the persistent precarity experienced by LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, as a consequence of the Government's inaction to recognise, include, and protect their rights. They reaffirm findings shared over the past five years of service provision.

Community Lawyer Donielle Jones sees four main hurdles LGBTQI+ people face when navigating legal processes: fear of disclosure, hostile public institutions, the lack of legal recognition for trans, non-binary or gender-diverse persons, and the denial of parental/guardianship and inheritance rights. She adds, "Something as simple as filing a police report, seeking medical attention or filing a legal application sometimes means being laughed at and/or re-traumatized." As a result of their lack of legal status, "community members avoid legal help entirely because they're afraid their identity will be used against them, even in cases like domestic violence, employment disputes, or housing issues," Jones says.



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The Programme's clinical interventions are guided by the framework and practice of healing justice, which addresses trauma and systemic oppression by fostering community-led healing, collective wellness and resilience. For **Community Caseworker Rae Alibey**, "healing cannot be separated from justice." She firmly believes that for clients who live "in the intersection of stigma and discrimination, violence (economic, political, social), family rejection, and intentional institutional exclusion – healing justice creates opportunities, not only to recover emotionally, but also to re-engage with education, employment, relationships, advocacy, and public life."

Responding to the needs of LGBTQI+ clients and community members who experience a violation is very demanding work. Wholeness and Justice service providers feel hopeful when:

- Interventions result in clients finally feeling heard and seen;
- Interventions lead to client empowerment in affirming their rights to state support;
- Judicial spaces seem more respectful to LGBTQI+ people;
- They witness transformation, resilience, and survival among the most marginalised community members.

Recommendations: The 2025 *Insights Report* proposes several policy recommendations that provide effective ways for the Government to meet its obligations to ensure rights and protection for LGBTQI+ people, prevent the perpetuation of discrimination and provide mechanisms for redress. These policy recommendations align with the [2025 LGBTQI+ Policy Agenda](#). CAISO reiterates the long-standing calls to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for legislative and policy changes, most urgently to the Equal Opportunity Act, to address the exclusion of sexual orientation and to add LGBTQI+ status under the protections. This is one significant, meaningful change that the Government can initiate to begin addressing the silences and gaps in legislation and procedures. This demand (in addition to the policy recommendations made in the *Insights Report* and the **2025 Policy Agenda**) aligns with this year's IDAHOBIT theme, *The Heart of Democracy*, because truly democratic societies must be built on equity, justice, and inclusion for all citizens, including those who identify as LGBTQI+, and whose rights are under threat, worldwide.

For the meaningful and reparative inclusion and protection of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, attention must be paid to different aspects of their lives that impact community members' ability to live fully and equally. This includes physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing, as well as livelihood opportunities. This is precisely why CAISO has embarked on the expansion of Wholeness & Justice through Growing Spaces. However, the State is responsible for ensuring the rights of all citizens. CAISO continues to advocate for policy and legislative changes that will ensure LGBTQI+ people can enjoy their rights and freedoms. As we do our part to work for social, economic, and cultural rights for a more just and inclusive society and world for all, CAISO invites the public to follow our work and support efforts to create change.

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) is a call to action to eliminate discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people in all aspects of life. Launched in 2004 by Martiniquan Georges-Louis Tin, the date - May 17th - commemorates the World Health Organization's 1990 decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. Since then, the day has served as a focal point for raising awareness of the violence and discrimination still faced by LGBTQI+ people across the globe. It was first celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago in 2010.

*LGBTQI+ persons in Trinidad and Tobago who have experienced a violation, or who need help determining same, may contact CAISO's **Wholeness & Justice Programme** for support via phone at **868-28-CAISO (282-2476)** or via email at wholenessandjustice@caisott.org. [END]*