

OPEN LETTER

May 28, 2014

The Honourable John Baird
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2
Canada

Dear Minister Baird,

The 44th regular session of the OAS General Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay, is quickly approaching. As one of the few Canadian civil society organizations registered with the OAS, and the only one working specifically on the advancement of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons within the hemisphere, we call upon the Federal government to support all resolutions that seek to advance the human rights of LGBT persons within the hemisphere.

The human rights situation for LGBT persons varies dramatically across the region. Several countries in the Americas have moved in recent years to introduce marriage equality, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, or enhanced anti-discrimination protections, such as Colombia, and Chile. However, male same-sex sexual activity remains illegal in 11 OAS member states, including Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. In many more countries, LGBT persons face persistently high levels of hate-crimes and violence, often with the complicity of state authorities.

The OAS General Assembly provides the Canadian government an important opportunity to demonstrate leadership in supporting human rights for LGBT persons in the region. We specifically call on the government to support the following resolution: *Human Rights, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression* (presented by the Brazilian delegation to the OAS). We believe this resolution can act as a catalyst to improve the human rights situation for LGBT persons in many OAS member states.

In addition, we urge the Canadian government to back declarations supportive of the work of human rights defenders, as well as those connected to the *Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance*.

It is imperative that the Canadian government stand with those seeking to improve the human rights situation for LGBT persons across the Americas.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Kennedy
Executive Director
Egale Canada Human Rights Trust