



**DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DRAFT KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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AT THE

STRONGER TOGETHER II CONFERENCE

***“SOLIDARITY, STRATEGY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR LGBTQI
MOVEMENTS”***

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**women, youth &
persons with disabilities**
Department:
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
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Distinguished delegates, organizers, activists, allies and friends from across the Caribbean, Canada, the United States and beyond, good morning.

I bring greetings from South Africa's Ministry of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and from communities on the African continent that are waging similar struggles for freedom and dignity. I must apologise that I am unable to join you in Kingston, Jamaica, due to competing national responsibilities in Parliament and Cabinet in the Republic.

However, I am deeply honoured to lend my voice, my solidarity and my unwavering support to the ***Stronger Together II – Solidarity, Strategy and Collective Action for LGBTQI Movements***, convened by CariFLAGS, ILGA-NAC and ECADE.

These organisations, together with our host networks, have created a regional space where over the next few days we will strengthen solidarity, deepen collaboration and design strategies for sustaining movements of LGBTI communities.

I want to thank the organising committee for extending this invitation and for hosting a self-funded regional convening that prioritises participation from the Caribbean while offering limited scholarships for those who would otherwise be unable to attend. Your commitment to inclusivity and the recognition that our movements must be adequately resourced are themselves acts of solidarity.

I also acknowledge the many activists who have travelled long distances to be here. Your presence is a testament to our collective commitment to the idea that we are indeed stronger together.

Programme Director, we gather at a turbulent moment. Across the globe, we are witnessing polarisation, disinformation, democratic backsliding, anti-rights and anti-gender organising, populism, moral panic, economic pressure and shrinking civic space. These forces thrive on fear and falsehood, seeking to roll back hard-won gains in gender justice, sexual and reproductive rights, trans inclusion and broader human rights. They are coordinated, well-resourced and global; to confront them we must be equally coordinated, resourced and united.

At the same time, this is a moment of potential.

The Stronger Together II conference recognises that our movements in the Caribbean, North America and beyond can no longer afford to work in isolation. We are here to exchange knowledge, identify shared challenges and explore strategies for sustaining our movements in a rapidly changing political and funding landscape.

We are resolute that when they attack trans rights, they are attacking bodily autonomy. When they attack reproductive rights, they are attacking democracy. And when they attack LGBTI organisations, they are attacking all who imagine a future rooted in equality and justice.

Thirty years ago, South Africans celebrated the birth of a constitutional democracy founded on equality, dignity and freedom. Our Constitution

remains one of the few in the world that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

It guarantees the right to marry whomever we choose; it affirms bodily autonomy; it commits the state to redress historical inequalities. Yet in our streets and homes we still battle gender-based violence, hate crimes, poverty, youth unemployment, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia and digital violence. The South African story teaches us that rights in law must be defended in daily life. A progressive constitution is necessary but not sufficient; without organised communities, vigilant civil society, accountable institutions and resourced movements, paper rights can become empty promises.

South Africa's experiences are part of a broader Global South narrative.

Across Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, movements have shown that backlash is not inevitable. Marriage equality has been won and defended in countries with diverse cultural and religious contexts. Anti-discrimination laws have been passed where once there was criminalisation. Trans people have gained legal recognition and healthcare. These victories remind us that progress is possible, but they also remind us that rights can be reversed when movements shrink, leadership stagnates and donors withdraw.

Our presence here underscores the urgency of building resilient movements that can withstand waves of backlash.

The theme of this conference emphasises solidarity, strategy and collective action. Solidarity must be more than a slogan. It is a

commitment to stand with one another across borders and identities, recognising that no struggle is single-issue because people do not live single-issue lives. Our movements intersect with struggles against racial injustice, patriarchy, climate breakdown, economic exploitation, disability exclusion, ageism and migration-related xenophobia. When we organise together, we amplify our collective power.

Solidarity also requires humility. As South Africans, we come not to teach but to learn and to share. We acknowledge the pioneering work of Caribbean activists who, despite colonial legacies and punitive laws, have built vibrant organisations and secured important wins. Our solidarity is rooted in mutual respect and in the recognition that the Global South has expertise to offer and lessons to learn. Together we can build a more resilient and coordinated global LGBTI movement that transcends language, geography and ideology.

A key purpose of this conference is to unpack the needs of the present moment and rethink how we respond. We must take a clear-eyed look at the anti-rights actors arrayed against us. They are not a monolith; they include conservative faith leaders, nationalist politicians, corporate interests, digital disinformation networks and even some international donors. Their tactics range from legislative bans on trans healthcare and gender-affirming education to attacks on reproductive rights, censorship, criminalisation of advocacy, cyber-harassment and intimidation of human-rights defenders. They thrive on the false narrative that rights are a zero-sum game – that protecting LGBTI people somehow threatens cultural values or national sovereignty. We know this is not true.

We must expose these tactics and articulate our own narrative: that protecting LGBTI people strengthens democracy and benefits everyone. When constitutions uphold dignity and equality, the whole society becomes freer. When schools teach children that diversity is a strength, we produce compassionate citizens. When health systems recognise gender diversity, they become more responsive for everyone. Our discussions must therefore situate LGBTI rights within a broader defence of human rights, constitutionalism and multilateralism.

We surely have all observed an alarming trend: organisations closing their doors, programming being discontinued, reform processes underway and staff being terminated. This is not simply a funding problem; it is a political problem. When civic space shrinks and donors shift priorities, grassroots organisations become vulnerable. Our response must be to diversify funding sources, build community-based resource mobilisation, advocate for government support and hold donors accountable to the principles of equality and justice.

Movement sustainability also requires intergenerational leadership. Young activists are already leading the fight against digital violence and climate injustice; elders bring institutional memory and strategic vision. We must bridge these generations, ensuring mentorship, care and shared leadership.

Sustainability further demands that we centre the well-being of activists. Burnout, trauma and violence cannot be the cost of participation. We must build structures of collective care, trauma-informed practice and safety for those on the front lines.

The conference objectives emphasise a cross-movement solidarity framework with feminist, trade union, youth, climate justice and broader social-justice movements. This is not optional; it is essential. LGBTI persons are workers, parents, migrants, farmers, artists, people living with HIV, people with disabilities.

When trade unions fight for living wages and safe workplaces, they advance our dignity. When climate-justice movements demand reparations and sustainable economies, they address environmental racism and the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalised communities. When feminist movements insist that bodily autonomy includes sexual orientation, gender identity and reproductive rights, they broaden the base of liberation. Our activism should therefore be intersectional not just rhetorically but structurally – through shared agendas, joint campaigns, co-authored research and reciprocal support.

This conference is not simply a gathering for inspiration; it is designed to produce a shared regional advocacy roadmap, agree on three to five regional priorities, strengthen coordination, develop a cross-movement solidarity statement, identify campaigns and partnerships, align funding priorities, and strengthen leadership and collective care structures.

In other words, we are here to do the hard work of strategising. I propose the following strategic pillars for our deliberations. We must:

1. **Defend gains and push forward** – Map existing legal protections across our region and identify threats to them. Establish rapid-response mechanisms to defend rights when they are under

attack, and support strategic litigation and advocacy for progressive reforms.

2. **Build narratives of hope** – Invest in communications strategies that counter disinformation and moral panic. Tell our stories in ways that resonate with local cultures. Work with artists, influencers and community leaders to show that LGBTI people have always been part of our societies.
3. **Invest in movement infrastructure** – Explore regional funding mechanisms, solidarity funds and cooperative economies. Encourage donors to support core costs and long-term institutional strengthening rather than just projects. Develop leadership pipelines that prioritise women, trans and intersex people, people with disabilities and young people.
4. **Develop regional and global alliances** – Strengthen ties with African, Latin American, Asian and European movements. Engage with multilateral forums such as the UN, Commonwealth and regional human-rights systems. Build alliances with faith-based organisations, academic institutions, trade unions and private sector allies. Advocate for regional bodies – including the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States – to adopt and implement human-rights standards.
5. **Advance research and evidence** – Invest in research that documents the social, economic and health realities of LGBTI people in the Caribbean, Canada and the United States. Use data to inform advocacy, to influence policymakers and to hold governments

accountable. ILGA-NAC's evidence brief on the economic and employment realities of 2SLGBTQIA+ people is an example of the kind of region-wide research we need.

As we engage in panel discussions, presentations and facilitated working groups over the next three days, let us remember why we came. We came because we believe that every person deserves dignity, freedom and the right to live without fear. We came because we have seen the transformative power of organised communities. And we came because we know that our movements – though under-resourced – have the imagination to re-envision our world.

When this conference ends, our work will not.

The real measure of our success will be seen in how we translate our discussions into action, how we support each other when the cameras are gone, how we show up in the courts, streets, parliaments, villages and digital spaces. We must commit to staying connected, sharing resources, alerting each other to threats, celebrating each other's victories and amplifying each other's voices. Let us leave this space with a renewed sense of purpose, recognising that solidarity is our strategy and collective action is our tool.

In closing, I return to the words that name this convening: ***Stronger Together***. This is not just a slogan; it is a reality we must enact.

We are stronger when the Caribbean stands with South Africa, when North American allies invest in Caribbean movements, when African feminists link arms with Caribbean climate activists. We are stronger when

donors listen to the priorities of grassroots organisations and fund them sustainably. We are stronger when our movements welcome Black, brown, Indigenous, intersex, trans, non-binary, disabled, HIV-positive and migrant voices into leadership. And we are stronger when we remember that defending the rights of the most marginalised is the surest way to defend democracy for all.

Thank you for the honour of addressing you. May our time together be transformative, may our strategies be courageous, and may our solidarity be unbreakable.

I thank you!