



## Canada announces millions in new funding for the global LGBTQI movement

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OTTAWA: Canada is stepping up as a global leader supporting LGBTQI rights with a new commitment of \$30 million in dedicated funding over five years, followed by \$10 million per year to advance human rights and improve socio-economic outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people (LGBTQI) people in developing countries.

Canada's International Development Minister and the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQI Issues made the announcement in Ottawa on February 7.

"This announcement is welcome, necessary, and overdue," said Doug Kerr, lead for Dignity Network. "This is an important step forwards demonstrating Canadian engagement on supporting the human rights of LGBTQI people globally. This funding will strengthen both Canadian civil society's ability to support our partners around the world as well as directly support human rights defenders globally working to make change."

In more than 70 countries, homosexuality is still criminalized, and in eight countries gay people can face the death penalty. Even in countries with supportive legal environments, LGBTQI people are often some of the most marginalized populations, resulting in lower educational outcomes, unemployment rates, and access to housing, health services, and financial services.

LGBTQI organizations around the world have mobilized to have their rights respected and upheld. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) currently counts 1516 member organizations from 152 countries.

“At the same time, while the global LGBTQI movement has grown, funding to support this work has faced considerable obstacles,” Kerr said. “That has made it increasingly difficult for human rights defenders and activists to do their important work.”

According to the Global Philanthropy Project, foundations, corporations, governments, and multilateral agencies contributed roughly \$126 million dollars to LGBTQI issues in the global South and East during the two-year period of 2015 to 2016 – a decrease of over \$2 million from previous years. In the case of governments, this represents less than four cents for every \$100 of international aid and assistance.

“The need for Canada to commit funding in support of LGBTQI organizations around the world has never been more apparent,” Kerr said. “Our hope that this fund is used toward advocacy for LGBTQI rights.”

Through a call to action organized by the Dignity Network in 2015, Canadian organizations representing LGBTQI issues, human rights, women’s rights, and development assistance have called upon the Canadian government to make a sizeable contribution to LGBTQI-inclusive development assistance. “We are pleased that Minister Bibeau made this announcement after consultations with civil society groups,” Kerr said.

Since that time, Canada’s foreign policy leadership on LGBTQI issues has grown considerably: Canada currently co-chairs the Equal Rights Coalition, a global intergovernmental coalition of 40 countries focused on advancing LGBTQI rights and inclusive development. In September, Canada joined the UN LGBTQI Core Group with Ecuador. Canada’s missions have increasingly been on the forefront of addressing LGBTQI rights violations through quiet diplomacy. However, more often than not, the most effective approach to advancing LGBTQI rights is to financially support the organizations who work tirelessly on the frontlines to do so. This announcement assures that Canada’s rhetoric on supporting LGBTQI rights is supported by significant international aid.

“The next step will be making sure that this funding is accessible to grassroots organizations, especially trans, non-binary, and intersex-led initiatives,” Kerr said. “It will be crucial that civil society groups in Canada continue to shape how this fund is dispersed.”

Given the structural barriers many emergent LGBTQI initiatives face internationally, the true value of Canada’s funding commitment will hinge on its ability to learn from those working on the frontlines. Canadian civil society stands ready to support in this work.

## **About Dignity Network**

Dignity Network is a group of organizations across Canada involved in supporting the human rights of LGBTQI people globally. The purpose of the network is to provide a platform for Canadian based-organizations and individuals and their global partners to support the human rights of LGBTQI people globally, including issues related to LGBTQI refugees.

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