



9th June 2010

Hon. Glenn Ramadharsingh, Minister
Hon. Dr. Lincoln Douglas, Minister in the Ministry
Ministry of the People & Social Development
ANSA McAL Building, 69 Independence Square
Port of Spain

Dear Ministers Ramadharsingh & Douglas:

Congratulations on your success and that of your parties in week-before-last's election; and on your appointments to steward this bold new Ministry.

I am writing at the earliest opportunity, on behalf of the Coalition Advocating for Inclusion of Sexual Orientation (CAISO), the leading national advocacy voice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) issues, to present you with a readymade opportunity to fulfil the promise of the Ministry of the People for GLBT citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. CAISO is offering our partnership to the Ministry in convening in July or early August a "Pride-month" forum for Government to listen to the many concerns and experiences of GLBT citizens with regard to violence, exploitation, inequality, discrimination and ill-treatment, in daily life and in our attempts to access basic services and benefits, including employment, education and housing, or to exercise our fundamental rights.

This July will mark the sixteenth annual celebration of Pride by local gay, lesbian, bi and trans communities. In recent years the month and the weeks preceding and following it have been marked by a series of events that help us to celebrate our community and culture, commemorate our achievements and mourn our losses, educate each other and build our capacity, and organize. At the start of Pride 2009, GLBT communities and our advocacy groups launched a campaign in which, over the course of the past year, we have clamoured with markedly increased visibility and noisiness for our members' inclusion in Government policy and programmes and recognition as full and equal citizens. For the first time ever, GLBT issues played a visible role in the election that brought your government to power. Our survey of voters in our community suggests we voted for the People's Partnership in numbers higher than the national average.

At a meeting this past weekend, our Coalition discussed a proposal to include in this year's Pride celebrations a noisy protest demonstration to demand equal opportunity, full citizenship and an end to the criminalization of consensual sexual intimacy among GLBT Trinidadians and Tobagonians. We have decided to defer such an action. Instead, we are seeking to respond to the invitation your new Government has offered citizens in various communities in the nation, in establishing the Ministry of the People, to work together to address particular problems that plague us, in ways that forestall such protest action.

We are eager and ready to work with your staff and those of other relevant Ministries to organize a Ministry-sponsored and -funded forum in conjunction with Pride month 2010. The

forum would provide a means for Government to document, and work with us to determine appropriate responses to, a number of social and civic problems faced by a group of citizens who remain one of the most misunderstood and stigmatised minorities in the nation, and against whom discrimination, violence and public prejudice are still widely seen as legitimate, even warranted.

We are aware that the issue of same-sex marriage is an especially troublesome one for those in political office. While it is a matter of legitimate concern for a number of members of our community, we do not anticipate that in the forum we are proposing it would dominate over other issues CAISO has found more urgent need to focus on in our advocacy work — such as police abuse, equal access to justice, mistreatment in healthcare and social services, family and community violence, homelessness, employment discrimination, mental health and school safety. We hope that fear of one issue does not serve as grounds for declining to listen to our community's broader concerns.

We look forward to your response, and to Government joining our communities in marking Pride month with an important, collaborative event. Your willingness to acknowledge our community and our concerns as citizens will go a long way towards mitigating the hurt done by statements the Prime Minister made during the campaign suggesting this Government might single us out as citizens whose enjoyment of human rights is subject to the approval of a majority of other citizens.

We would be delighted to hear from your Ministry at 758-7676 or caisott@gmail.com to confirm interest in our offer, and to commence planning and cooperation on the event.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Robinson', with a large, stylized initial 'C' on the left.

Colin Robinson
Communications Coordinator

cc: Hon. Mary King, Minister of Planning, Social/Economic Restructuring & Gender Affairs
Christine Sookram & Antonia Popplewell Permanent Secretaries