

REGIONAL SEMINAR

“SHARING EXPERIENCES AND STORIES AMONG PARLIAMENTARIANS TO ADVANCE EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN”

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF COSTA RICA
FORMER PRESIDENTS OF THE REPUBLIC CONFERENCE ROOM
MARCH 9-10, 2017 | SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

FULL REPORT

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2017

9:00 – 10:00 am: Inauguration of the Parliamentary Seminar

Dip. José Alberto Alfaro Jiménez, President of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica: Dip. Alfaro said he was pleased to host the Seminar and thanked Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) for its “laudable work” promoting human rights. He stressed the obligation of States to respect and guarantee human rights, which are inherent to all people, regardless of their personal characteristics. He also mentioned that public authorities must take all necessary measures to make sure every person is treated with the same dignity, so everyone feels included in society and discrimination is rooted out. Dip. Alfaro thanked all participants at the Seminar on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica.

Dip. Ronny Monge Salas, Liberación Nacional Parliamentary Group at the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, PGA Board member and Co-Convenor of PGA’s Gender, Equality and Population Programme: Dip. Monge welcomed all participants to Costa Rica, a “small country, but full of love and affection towards all those who come to visit.” He expressed his wish that we all could really be “free and equal in rights,” as is stated in classical texts, and voiced his concern for the situation of indigenous people, migrants and other marginalized groups. The fight for equality, Dip. Monge said, is “a fight without end.” He described PGA’s mission and the purpose of *Advancing the Human Rights and Inclusion of LGBTI People: A Handbook for Parliamentarians* (the SOGI Handbook), a joint publication of PGA and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He also explained that among the objectives of the Seminar was for MPs, from all participating countries, to commit to at least one specific action to be carried out over the next three months. Dip. Monge encouraged attendees to form PGA National Groups in those countries that do not have one already and said that every country walks at its own pace, the most important thing is to keep looking ahead and moving forward.

Ms. Mónica Adame Martínez, Director of the Gender, Equality and Population Programme, PGA: Ms. Adame, on behalf of PGA, thanked the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica for hosting the Seminar and all participants for attending. She thanked PGA’s National Group in Costa Rica and Dip. Monge, as well as their offices, for making the Seminar possible. Ms. Adame explained the work of PGA and, in particular, PGA’s SOGI Campaign. She also shared examples of best practices and advances in terms of non-discrimination in the Americas. Among the Member States of the Inter-

American System, Ms. Adame explained, approximately 19 have anti-discrimination legislation, 10 countries criminalize private and consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex and five countries do not legislate this matter. She stressed the importance of collaboration between parliaments and civil society to promote the exchange of information to lead to legislative reforms and mentioned some examples of successful collaboration in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, El Salvador and Dominican Republic. Ms. Adame also highlighted the need for constant sensitization and education when it comes to LGBTI rights and the role the SOGI Handbook is intended to play in this regard. She also encouraged participants to make the stories of LGBTI people in the Americas more visible and to disseminate and support the efforts of the Inter-American System towards equality and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. On behalf of PGA, Ms. Adame made herself available to all attendees to collaborate towards this goal.

Mr. Marco Castillo Rojas, President, Diversity Movement pro Human Rights and Health, Costa Rica: Mr. Castillo started reading a quote from the *Joint UN statement on Ending violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people*: “Human rights are universal – cultural, religious and moral practices and beliefs and social attitudes cannot be invoked to justify human rights violations against any group, including LGBTI persons.” And then asked, if so, why does Costa Rica, globally recognized as democratic, continue to promote discrimination? His response: because of the fundamentalism that paralyzes legislative projects by imposing its vision. Mr. Castillo also denounced the lack of judicial advances, but acknowledged the “forceful albeit limited” advances coming from the executive power, including the consultation of the State of Costa Rica to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding the patrimonial rights of same-sex couples and the trans persons’ right to change their name without a judicial process. He outlined five demands of his organization in the medium term: recognition of gender identity, recognition of same-sex couples, elimination of discrimination and outlawing of hate crimes, health policies in accordance with the needs of LGBTI people and appropriate attention to people affected by HIV. Some of these goals, Mr. Castillo lamented, require a legislative process. He concluded recognizing the work of the Costa Rican parliamentarians that are working to advance this agenda and pledging his support to keep moving “forward, always forward.”

10:30 am – 12:00 pm: Situation of LGBTI persons in the Americas and progress in achieving equality and non-discrimination

Moderator: *Mr. Alex Roche del Fraile*, Programme Officer, SOGI Campaign, Parliamentarians for Global Action

Speakers:

Dip. Maureen Clarke Clarke, Liberación Nacional Parliamentary Group Leader, Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica: Dip. Clarke lamented that in the 21st century some people are “more equal than others” and that some people are not “visible” enough because there are “taboo topics,” difficult to introduce in the agenda. She made a presentation about the situation of LGBTI people that parliamentarians can help address, mentioning the problems of exclusion, discrimination, violence and criminalization of private and consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex, with particular attention to the situation in the Americas. A thorough understanding of the gravely negative impacts on human rights and sustainable human development that are caused by

discrimination against and the exclusion of LGBTI people and, conversely, awareness of the benefits that inclusive processes and promoting freedom and equality create, said Dip. Clarke, are instrumental for effective parliamentary action on LGBTI issues. She also discussed some of the advances in the Americas, for example in terms of the recognition of gender identity and the rights of same-sex couples. When it comes to Costa Rica, Dip. Clarke admitted that the progress in this country has been slow. She mentioned a number of legislative projects that have not advanced in parliament, mostly due to religious opposition. Some of them are being debated at the Human Rights Parliamentary Commission that Dip. Clarke presides. These projects in parliament include provisions to protect against discrimination in employment, an anti-discrimination law that includes protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity, the recognition of same-sex couples (either through marriage equality or civil unions) and a gender identity law.

Mr. Orlando Habet, Member of Parliament, National Assembly of Belize: Mr. Habet explained the context in Belize, a small country where everyone knows each other and many people are confused with terminology regarding LGBTI issues, which are often considered a “first world agenda.” Also, there is homophobia and discrimination and no Pride parades for fear of violence. He mentioned a 2013 UNAIDS survey which found that 34% of Belizeans consider themselves accepting of homosexuals, while another 34% consider themselves tolerant of homosexuals. Of all the Caribbean countries that were polled, said Mr. Habet, Belize and Suriname had the highest percentage of acceptance for homosexuals. He also discussed the positive impact of the Supreme Court of Belize’s ruling on the country’s “anti-sodomy” law (Section 53 of the Belize Criminal Code). On 10 August 2016, Chief Justice Kenneth Benjamin ruled that Section 53 contravened constitutional protections of equality, dignity and personal privacy. Mr. Habet explained that, even though the ruling is currently being appealed to the Caribbean Court of Justice, Belize’s “sodomy” ban was the first one in a former British colony in the Caribbean to be judicially overturned and it was also the last “sodomy” ban in Central America to be struck down. The Chief Justice also accepted that removing Section 53 would help accelerate the fight against HIV, especially among men who have sex with men, who are stigmatized and thus refuse to participate in testing and treatment programs. Mr. Habet added that Belize has also an immigration law prohibiting foreign homosexuals from entering the country, although the law has never been enforced. However, the court ruling striking down the “sodomy” law also stated that the Constitution barred discrimination based on one’s sexual orientation.

Sen. Maureen Payne-Hyman, Senate of Antigua and Barbuda: Sen. Payne-Hyman spoke about the context in Antigua and Barbuda, where she said there is a high level of tolerance, but also people who suffer discrimination. She mentioned that in her country there is no culture of “coming out” and that it is very hard to be openly LGBTI. A significant factor contributing to this situation is the fact that religion is very influential and Churches are very vocal and outspoken. Sen. Payne-Hyman explained that “buggery” is a criminal offence in Antigua and Barbuda and that decriminalization of private and consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex is very difficult because of the influence of the Church. For decriminalization to be successful, she said, there would need to be a paradigm shift. Sen. Payne-Hyman also told the story of a gay man in Antigua and Barbuda who appealed a judicial ruling against him arguing that the judge had expressed her dislike for LGBTI people. Even though the man did not have a lawyer, he managed to win on appeal, which, Sen. Payne-Hyman indicated, proves that LGBTI people can eventually get justice.

Ms. Angie Cruickshank, Human Rights Specialist, United Nations System in Costa Rica: Ms. Cruickshank stressed that all States have a legal obligation to respect and guarantee the internationally recognized human rights of LGBTI people. She mentioned the HIV epidemic in Latin America and the barriers to health care suffered by LGBTI people. Ms. Cruickshank also celebrated that the political landscape at the UN level on these issues has changed over the last several years and that a lot of progress has been made. She specifically mentioned the importance of the recently appointed UN SOGI Independent Expert, Mr. Vitit Muntarhorn, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and the Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind. Ms. Cruickshank concluded by stating that the United Nations is working with the Republic of Costa Rica to address UPR recommendations and advance the human rights and inclusion of LGBTI people.

Mr. Rodrigo Campos Hernández, President of ISCA Movement, Costa Rica: Mr. Campos denounced that approximately six million LGBTI people in Central America are “enchained” due to the exclusion, discrimination and violence they suffer. He explained that, even though the Constitutions of Central American countries like Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador recognize the equal dignity of all people, without distinctions, many people face violence for being non-conforming. Mr. Campos spoke of a “sea of innocent blood,” mentioning for example that 168 LGBTI people were assassinated with impunity in Honduras in 2009. He lamented that structurally, religious fundamentalism rules without constraints in States that are, for the most part secular (Costa Rica is an exception). Mr. Campos concluded by explaining that the ISCA Movement has been established as an umbrella group of LGBTI civil society organizations in Central America with the aim of participating in the Consultative Council of the Central American Integration System (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana, or SICA, in Spanish).

During the period for comments, Jane Keith Durán of the Front for Equal Rights thanked Dip. Monge and Dip. Atencio for their commitment to the inclusion of LGBTI people and said that this issue is a human rights issue and that everyone should have access to the same rights, because LGBTI people are also citizens that pay their taxes.

Dip. Marvin Atencio, who is a member of the Human Rights Commission in the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, lamented that some legislative projects are stuck in parliament. For example, he mentioned that the civil unions bill has approximately 1,300 motions against it introduced by the five evangelical members of parliament (of a total of 57), which makes it very difficult to move forward. Dip. Atencio wondered what would be the best strategy to bring this sector on board with these types of projects.

Dip. Monge from Costa Rica (PGA Board member and Co-Convenor of PGA’s Gender, Equality and Population Programme) also intervened to say one does not respect nor love the people or things one does not know. He stated that he owes PGA his sensitization on these issues and that parliamentarians need to get out of their bubble and realize what is going on around them: some people are being killed for being LGBTI. It is understandable that MPs want to get reelected, Dip. Monge explained, but they also need to think about the people they represent and think about what they want to achieve with their reelection.

Senator Wade Mark, from Trinidad and Tobago, stressed the importance of cultural contexts and wondered how to reduce the influence of the Churches on LGBTI issues. Perhaps, he said, PGA could help by appealing to the highest authorities of the different confessions. Sen. Mark also stated politicians need to stand up for principle. He lamented that, even though Trinidad and Tobago is a secular State, the Prime Minister does not want to talk against the “buggery” law because of the political influence of evangelical and Muslim faith groups.

Mr. Orlando Habet, Member of the National Assembly of Belize, said that having a united political front is key to achieve progress on LGBTI issues and expressed hope that a new generation of younger politicians will be able to advance equality and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Mr. Julio César Calvo, president of the Diverse Chamber of Commerce of Costa Rica, shared his personal story of “coming out” in a deeply religious family (his parents were evangelical pastors) and stressed the potential economic benefits for Costa Rica if the country were more open and welcoming to LGBTI visitors.

Finally, Mr. Abel Moya, priest of the Lutheran Church in Costa Rica, while recognizing the pernicious influence of many religious groups when it comes to the rights of LGBTI people, reminded the participants that this is not always the case and mentioned the example of more open and inclusive religious figures, like Desmond Tutu and Pope Francis. Mr. Moya also stressed the vital importance of education in advancing the inclusion of LGBTI people.

1:45 – 3:15 pm: Tools and best practices for parliamentarians in their legislative role

Moderator: *Dip. Marvin Atencio Delgado*, President of PGA’s National Group, Partido Acción Ciudadana Parliamentary Group, Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. Dip. Atencio introduced the SOGI Handbook.

Speakers:

Dip. Marcela Guerrero Campos, Partido Acción Ciudadana Parliamentary Group, Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica: Dip. Guerrero thanked PGA and UNDP for producing the SOGI Handbook and the PGA National Group in Costa Rica for organizing the Seminar in collaboration with the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. The theme of her presentation was “Which side of History do we want to be part of?” To illustrate both extremes, she showed a map with the countries that have achieved marriage equality and then a map with the countries that criminalize private and consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex. Dip. Guerrero recommended the section of the SOGI Handbook that allows readers to assess where your country stands on LGBTI rights and the Nepal case study, which refers to progressive Constitutional reform. She stressed the importance of a parliamentarian’s representation role, since all constituents have the right to be recognized without discrimination, as well as the oversight role and reaching out to civil society. Dip. Guerrero also mentioned that it was vital for MPs and other stakeholders to reach an understanding as human beings and that parliamentarians need to be innovative and always ready to listen. We do not always have to have all the answers, she said, sometimes it is enough to ask the right questions. Dip. Guerrero explained that homosexuality was illegal in Costa Rica until 1971 and now her party, for

example, has a Special LGBTI Commission, which shows the progress her country has made. She spoke of the recent legislative projects to advance the rights of LGBTI people in Costa Rica and highlighted the importance of, at least, having debates on these issues. In the end, Dip. Guerrero concluded, we can either be part of history or desert from it.

Sen. Wade Mark, Senator and Chair of PGA’s National Group, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago: Sen. Mark thanked PGA and the Legislative Assembly for organizing the Seminar and spoke of the importance of the SOGI Handbook. He highlighted that it is the duty of all States to protect everyone’s rights and repeal any discriminatory measures, like the criminalization of private and consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex. Sen. Mark mentioned two specific pieces of legislation in Trinidad and Tobago that are oppressive and discriminatory against LGBTI people: the Sexual Offences Act, which characterizes “sodomy” or “buggery” as a criminal offence, and the Immigration Act, which forbids “homosexuals” and other groups of people with “immoral purposes” from entering the country. He also talked about the legal challenge that a Trinidadian named Jason Jones has recently mounted against the State of Trinidad and Tobago to declare these two laws unconstitutional, as well as the case of Jamaican lawyer Maurice Tomlinson, who brought Belize and Trinidad and Tobago to the Caribbean Court of Justice for their discriminatory immigration provisions (his claim was dismissed). In addition, Sen. Mark explained that Trinidad and Tobago’s Equal Opportunity Act is in the process of being amended to add protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. He also said that the parliamentary device that allows the opposition to ask questions to the Prime Minister has been used to open public discussion on LGBTI issues in the country.

Mr. Lucien Govaard, Board member of Suriname Men United and Co-Chair of CariFLAGS Steering Committee, Suriname: Mr. Govaard shared his experiences as a civil society activist in Suriname, where he explained there are approximately 40 years of recorded history of LGBTI organizing. One of the key factors that spurred this activism was the belief expressed by some Surinamese that homosexuality needs to be cured. Mr. Govaard also spoke of the Universal Periodic Review of Suriname, which led to some positive developments from the part of the Ministry of Justice and Police to provide answers. He stressed that one of the key roles of civil society is to relay their concerns to their representatives and shared some of his findings and recommendations on how to do this in a successful way. Mr. Govaard concluded that different stakeholders have different roles, but that everyone should get together to be “part of the answer.”

Ms. Larissa Arroyo Navarrete, Representative of Movimiento ACCEDER, Costa Rica: Ms. Arroyo introduced herself as a human rights lawyer and a feminist bisexual cisgender woman and said that, as a privileged person, she felt an obligation to speak up about the discrimination suffered by LGBTI people. Among the points she touched upon: the imperative coordination between parliament and civil society organizations; the need for MPs to ask themselves who they respond to and what their priorities are; the importance of taking into account the specificities of each group within the LGBTI community and the concept of intersectionality; the idea that these discussions have to be conducted from a legal, not religious point of view; the fact that human rights do not depend on the economic production of each person; the pernicious influence of machismo, misogyny, sexism and patriarchy; the necessity to overcome the underrepresentation of women, lesbians and other marginalized groups; and the notion that human rights are non-negotiable.

During the time for discussion, Mr. Rodrigo Campos, President of ISCA Movement, highlighted the importance of educating and informing the general population about LGBTI-related issues, in a long process in which media plays a big role. Mr. Marco Castillo, President of the Diversity Movement, reinforced Ms. Arroyo's point about how essential it is to be very clear about one's priorities. Ms. Emma Chacón, from Colectiva IrreversibLes, said that religious beliefs must not be imposed and that human rights are non-negotiable and should not be contaminated with other agendas. She had a few suggestions for the SOGI Handbook (which she described as a "big improvement"): paying more attention to specificities within the LGBTI community and including lesbophobia and hate crimes in the definitions. Mr. Deivis Ventura, LGBTI civil society representative from Dominican Republic, suggested that PGA had a team of LGBTI activists in each country who can work towards sensitizing legislators, because, he said, "sensitization comes through presence." Finally, Dip. Monge from Costa Rica suggested to other MPs that a good way to make progress on these issues is to hire someone from the LGBTI community as member of their staff.

3:30 – 5:00 pm: Discussion about legislative initiatives to promote equality and inclusion of LGBTI persons

Moderator: *Mr. Juan Manuel Cordero González*, Deputy Ombudsman, Defensoría de los Habitantes de Costa Rica

Speakers:

Dip. Marta Arauz Mora, Second Secretary of the Directory of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica: Dip. Arauz welcomed all Seminar participants to the Legislative Assembly and stated that an inclusive motherland means, among other things, providing space for historically marginalized groups (women, for example) and ending any form of discrimination.

Dip. Carlos Manuel Arguedas Ramírez, Liberación Nacional Parliamentary Group, Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica and former Constitutional Judge in Costa Rica: Dip. Arguedas said that during his time as Constitutional Judge he worked on LGBTI-related issues and that now, as an MP, he is trying to advance progressive legislation in this area. He mentioned a definition of moral progress that he thinks is useful in this regard: a society makes moral progress to the extent that differences between people become irrelevant. Dip. Arguedas explained that the social concepts of marriage and family are evolving and that legislation should adapt to reflect these changes in society. He personally advocated for a Constitutional reform, but also acknowledged that there is an infra legislative channel (the Costa Rican government has taken significant steps on this front, he said) and the channel of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In conclusion, Dip. Arguedas encouraged Seminar participants to abandon tolerance (understood as a type of condescension) when it comes to the rights of LGBTI people and adopt a perspective of legally recognized and guaranteed fundamental rights.

Sen. Julio César Valentín, Senator for the province of Santiago, member of the Political Committee of the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD), Chair of PGA's National Group, Congress of Dominican Republic: Sen Valentín spoke about the project of General Law on Equality and Non-Discrimination in his country, a project in which PGA has participated and that was subjected to a socialization and discussion process with civil society organizations. He stressed the importance of

education and opening spaces for dialogue and lamented that in Dominican Republic discrimination depends to a large extent on the socioeconomic situation of each person. In conclusion, Sen. Valentín said that the fight for rights is permanent and expressed his personal commitment to advancing the rights of LGBTI people.

Mr. Deivis Ventura, Executive Director of Red de Voluntarios Amigos Siempre Amigos (REVASA), Dominican Republic: Mr. Ventura spoke as an LGBTI activist as well as a politician (he was the first openly LGBTI person to run for Congress in his country) and a religious person. He made an introduction about the different priorities that Dominican LGBTI groups have had over the years and mentioned the significant contribution of PGA in supporting their efforts. Mr. Ventura shared with Seminar participants some lessons learned from his experience as a social and political activist. In his opinion, it is important for everyone interested in moving the LGBTI agenda forward to: be radical and not too willing to negotiate everything with those who oppose human rights for all individuals; dismantle the myths of the fundamentalists, because they are not the majority; make use of transactional political tactics; divide the opponents; leave the “political closet,” politicize the LGBTI movement and promote the presence of LGBTI people in politics; create alliances with other oppressed groups; shape public opinion; and look for alternatives to legislation when laws at the federal level are hard to pass, for example alternatives at the municipal level. In conclusion, Mr. Ventura stated that a democracy that does not respect minorities should not be considered a real democracy.

Ms. Simone Hill, Coordinator of the NGO Promoting Empowerment through Awareness for Lesbian and Bisexual Women (PETAL), Belize: Ms. Hill denounced that in Belize, LGBTI individuals are penalized for personal decisions, while political parties on both sides of the aisle have failed to take a clear and formal pro-LGBTI stance. She mentioned a number of concrete steps that Belizean public officials can take to advance the rights of LGBTI people, including funding the Office of the Ombudsperson, investing in education and making inclusive political statements. Ms. Hill concluded stating “there is hope for Belize” and “we are silent no more, change must come.”

Ms. Natasha Jiménez Mata, Representative of Mulabi Movement/Espacio Latinoamericano de Sexualidades y Derechos, Costa Rica: Ms. Jiménez spoke in particular about the rights of trans and intersex people. She said that the 2010 reform of the Costa Rican Civil Registry, which allowed trans and intersex people to choose their name and photograph in official documents according to their identity, was an important step in terms of recognizing gender identity. But she mentioned that the project of Gender Identity Law introduced in the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica would make these changes easier by removing legal obstacles. Ms. Jiménez also denounced the situation of intersex people: one in every 200 births is of an intersex person, she said, and many baby girls are mutilated for having a clitoris that is considered “too large.” Ms. Jiménez concluded by exhorting MPs to present initiatives aimed at eliminating surgical violence against intersex people. Intersex people have the right to choose and “I am a living example that intersex people do not suffer any medical problem,” she stated.

In the period for comments, Ms. Margarita Salas, from the Beso Diverso Movement, celebrated the fact that the project of law of Equal Marriage in Costa Rica was introduced in the Legislative Assembly with the support of 50,000 citizen signatures and the sponsorship signatures from MPs of

three different parliamentary groups. She mentioned that the “political moment is built” and they should have a vision of the future in relation to marriage equality.

Mr. Marco Castillo, President of the Diversity Movement, shared his personal story of how he, as a Notary Public, officiated a wedding that was later annulled because the couple was of the same sex.

FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2017

9:00 – 10:30 am: Strengthening cooperation with civil society and decision-makers to guarantee no person is left behind within the Sustainable Development Goals framework

Moderator: *Ms. Mónica Adame Martínez*, Director of the Gender, Equality and Population Programme, Parliamentarians for Global Action

Speakers:

Dip. Gloria Reyes, Deputy Spokesperson of the Partido Revolucionario Moderno (PRM) Parliamentary Group, Congress of the Dominican Republic: Dip. Reyes mentioned the efforts in Dominican Republic to promote the inclusion of LGBTI people, in particular through the project of General Law on Equality and Non-Discrimination. She explained that this project covers the areas of health, employment, civil society organizations, media, etc. and is in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals. Dip. Reyes also spoke about the SOGI Handbook and encouraged Seminar participants to review the section on actions that parliamentarians can take such as sponsor debates and open participatory and consultation processes to advance the rights of the LGBTI community, guarantee allocation of resources to this agenda and monitor expenditures, influence politics and discuss projects of law with colleagues, etc. She concluded by reminding participants about the importance of committing to action.

Dip. Franklin Corella Vargas, Partido Acción Ciudadana Parliamentary Group, Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica: Dip. Corella spoke of the importance of a parliamentarians’ representative role and said that MPs should contribute to sensitizing the general population. The fight for fundamental rights, he explained, does not depend on political affiliation, but on the awareness of parliamentarians, and the LGBTI agenda is always timely. Dip. Corella suggested the following points: identify people within the different political parties that are sensitive to address this topic and make alliances; the human rights agenda is not only for recent or new politicians; look out for generators or public opinion shapers in civil society (artists, sports players, media, etc.); create spaces for dialogue in Congress to make visible the agenda as well as to design a legislative agenda to also create these spaces within political parties; train new politicians on human rights; and make public statements on discussion topics in political campaigns and international fora.

Ms. Kenita Placide, Executive Director of the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), Saint Lucia: Ms. Placide indicated that discrimination against LGBTI people is rife in the Caribbean and denounced the “anti-sodomy” laws that still exist in a number of countries in the region. She also spoke of Saint Lucia’s Human Rights Commission, which covers LGBTI-related issues, and of the HIV problem in the Caribbean, which disproportionately affects the LGBTI community. Ms. Placide explained that LGBTI groups in the Caribbean are collaborating with civil

society organizations representing women, people with special needs and other communities, as well as with the police, the judiciary, religious organizations, diplomats and governments, but lamented that they need security and more funding to be sustainable.

Ms. Grace Watamaleo, Member of Parliament, National Assembly of Suriname: Ms. Watamaleo indicated that Suriname's legislation effectively protects the rights of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, according to the country's Constitution and the international treaties Suriname has ratified. She mentioned that PGA's National Group in Suriname seeks to cooperate with the Parliamentary Commission of Justice and Police, the Parliamentary Commission of Education, the Parliamentary Commission of Health, the Committee on Diversity and Inclusiveness and the NGO LGBTI Platform Suriname, in order to promote parliamentary engagement towards a lawmaking framework that protects and promotes the rights of all individuals, including the LGBTI community. Ms. Watamaleo said achievements in Suriname include a roundtable on equality and no-discrimination based on SOGI (2015), dialogue between parliamentarians and LGBTI civil society (2015), a progressive Collective Labor Agreement, the installation of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusiveness by the Ministry of Justice and the dissemination of the SOGI Handbook.

Ms. Dayana Hernández, President of Transvida: Ms. Hernández explained that her group is mostly composed of trans women involved in sex work with a low education level. They began organizing around their health issues, for example distributing condoms to prevent illnesses like HIV. They have also promoted respect to gender identity, for example when it comes to photographs in official documents. Transvida has also sensitized police officers so they treat trans women with respect, created a jobs board and taught trans women about their rights. Ms. Hernández indicated that Transvida has collaborated with a number of public institutions on different public policies: with the Costa Rican Social Security administration regarding hormonal and other treatments, with the National Institute of Women regarding the recognition of trans women organizations, with the Ministry of Public Education to provide education programs for trans women, with the Institute on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction to provide counseling for trans women and with the Social Protection Board regarding HIV prevention, among others.

Mr. Julio César Calvo, President of the Diverse Chamber of Commerce of Costa Rica: Mr. Calvo presented the mission of the Diverse Chamber of Commerce, namely, to make the LGBTI community more visible through the development of equal and inclusive socioeconomic opportunities. He also briefly explained the Chamber's objectives, strategies and plans of action. Mr. Calvo indicated that the Chamber aims to be a platform to facilitate LGBTI people's entrepreneurship, employment in safe spaces and training. To close his presentation, he stated the following: an educated society does not discriminate, an advanced society is proud of its differences, and a peaceful society seeks prosperity for all citizens.

During the Q&A session, Ms. Larissa Arroyo (Acceder Movement) mentioned the importance of getting involved in political parties to reinforce the rule of law. Ms. Natasha Jiménez (Mulabi Movement) celebrated that this Seminar, which ten years ago would have been inconceivable, is being held, but lamented that when she visits the Legislative Assembly her visitor's name tag shows her former name, not the name she identifies with. Ms. Emma Chacón (Colectiva IrreversibLes) stressed the importance of accountability for parliamentarians. Mr. David Castillo, adviser to Dip.

Corella, highlighted the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals in ensuring that no one is left behind, including LGBTI persons.

10:30 am – 12:00 pm: Final thoughts and actions to be taken

Dip. Marvin Atencio Delgado, President of PGA’s National Group, Partido Acción Ciudadana Parliamentary Group, Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica: Dip. Atencio thanked all participants in the Seminar, which he said was a productive gathering. He described the SOGI Handbook as an “extremely important tool” and called upon all participants to reflect on whether the legal framework in their countries respects LGBTI rights because, as “Parliamentarians for Global Action, we have a responsibility” to promote equality and non-discrimination. Dip. Atencio stated that it is unacceptable that the majority discriminates against the minority and that LGBTI people must not be treated as second-class citizens. Finally, he reminded everyone of the collaboration between Transvida and different public institutions in Costa Rica and said that the final objective of MPs and other public servants is to improve health, education and, in general, quality of life for everyone.

Ms. Margarita Salas, Representative of Movimiento Beso Diverso/Front for Equal Rights, Costa Rica: Ms. Salas celebrated that the Legislative Assembly had hosted this Seminar about human rights. She explained that the association she represents, Beso Diverso, was born ten years ago to protest the expulsion from a bar of a same-sex couple who were kissing. Beso Diverso won its first legal challenge in 2012 because, Ms. Salas indicated, the political climate started to change. She honored the activists that preceded her and looked with hope to the future by saying: “because they were, we are. Because we are, they will be.” Ms. Salas stressed that the LGBTI community is not a minority, because their friends, family members and everyone who defends human rights stand with them. She denounced the grave situations of injustice suffered by LGBTI people and called upon parliamentarians to take action. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor, she said, quoting Desmond Tutu. Ms. Salas concluded: “let’s not let a radical minority block progress. Act!”

Dip. Monge from Costa Rica (PGA Board member and Co-Convenor of PGA’s Gender, Equality and Population Programme) replied to Ms. Salas’ intervention stating that she had inspired him. He admitted the fair share of responsibility of his political party for the limited progress on the rights of LGBTI people in Costa Rica and shared his personal story and his son’s who has been discriminated due to his autism. Dip. Monge stated that his commitment has always been to respect everyone’s rights, without distinction. He concluded reiterating that his office is always open and encouraged other participants to share their commitments.

During the closing session, participating MPs announced their commitment to actions. Please see the “San Jose Commitments to Action” document.

Dip. Monge offered concluding remarks thanking all participants for participating in the Seminar, especially those who traveled to Costa Rica from abroad. Senator Mark, from Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of PGA’s international delegation, thanked the Costa Rican MPs, the Legislative Assembly, PGA and all their staff for their work and kindness.