

From: STOCKHOLM

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Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: GLOBAL EQUALITY FUND FALL MEETING 18-19 OCTOBER: STOCKHOLM

[SENSITIVE]

ĀPITIHANGA – ATTACHMENTS

- GEF October 2023 Update
- Agenda for Distribution – Fall 2023 Partners Meeting of the Global Equality Fund v3

RĀPOPOTO – SUMMARY

Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific)/Tuia Tāngata Louisa Wall attended the Global Equality Fund (GEF) Fall meeting in Stockholm 18-19 October.

GEF partners warmly welcomed New Zealand to the GEF and are keen to increase the fund's knowledge of the Pacific. Ambassador Wall gave a presentation with DFAT colleague Samuel Lucas on the topic of Pacific Island SOGIESC community needs, the importance of involving the Pacific in dialogue, and of using indigenous language to reclaim pre-colonial indigenous values.

It was clear from the GEF meeting that this is a challenging time of backsliding and pushback on LGBTQI+ rights globally, and that threats that emerged during COVID-19 have remained. Backsliding on LGBTQI+ was seen as inextricably linked with a broader pushback on democracy.

Civil Society representatives expressed tiredness in the current environment, and a need for increased funding, particularly flexible, long-term core funding which enables long-term planning and capacity building, as well as better crisis response.

Ambassador Wall also held constructive meetings with SIDA, the U.S and German Special Envoys, Swedish Ambassador for Gender Equality Sofia Calltorp, and the Stockholm Sámi Association.

HOHENGĀ – ACTION

For information. **Please do not share details on participants or organisations involved more widely for participants' confidentiality and safety** (see paragraph 17).

s6(a)

s6(a)

PŪRONGO – REPORT

Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific/Tuia Tāngata) Louisa Wall attended the **Global Equality Fund Fall meeting on 18-19 October in Stockholm**, hosted by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), with support from post. This was the first GEF meeting to be convened since New Zealand joined GEF in June, and an opportunity for us to learn how GEF operates and engage with GEF partners. **GEF partners were enthusiastic in welcoming New Zealand to the fund** and expressed their appreciation for Ambassador Wall travelling so far to join the meeting. They were keen to hear New Zealand's perspectives and, with Australia also a member, improve GEFs knowledge of and engagement with the Pacific region. Day 1 of the meeting was focused on civil society perspectives, and Day 2 on GEF partner (donor) perspectives. (For the full details of speakers, objectives of the meeting, and topics for discussion, see the attached agenda).

GEF Day 1. Dialogue with GEF partner Civil Society Leaders

2 The GEF meeting was opened with welcome statements from s6(b)(ii)

SIDA was especially delighted to note that they have just signed another 3 year contract to administer GEF. Introductory comments noted that democratic backsliding and decreased funding for LGBTQI+ rights around the world only makes GEF as a platform even more important, and is an opportunity to stand with likeminded governments and civil society actors who work for equality. GEF strengthens civil society, legal actors, and helps protect against violence and discriminatory laws. It was also emphasised that GEF strengthens democracy, supports the global rules-based order, and multilateralism more broadly. The demand for support is massive, and has been growing – GEF estimates it will only be able to fund about 10% (30 million USD of about 300) of the funding requests for 2024. Introductory comments also emphasised that although there are many concerning developments for LGBTQI+ rights in the world, it is important to remember that progress is possible – citing the recent decriminalisation of same sex relations and transpersons in a number of countries.

The current landscape

3 **The Civil Society Organisation (CSO) leaders (for list of speakers, see attached Agenda) all expressed concern that COVID-19 had started a trend of backsliding on LGBTQI+ rights which has continued post-pandemic.** They are seeing a trend of governments using LGBTQI+ as a way to **push back on democracy**. One panellist noted that “it is not business as usual, every attack on human rights is a democratic backslide, and it is becoming systemic”, s6(a)

s6(b)(ii)

identified a trend across Africa, where an increase in **anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric appears to be “very coordinated”, “well-funded”, and “imported”**, from other places, often in connection with religious movements, s6(a)

Some of these have clear links with Russia, she added. These movements are using ideas of “African family values” and specific religious ideas to attack LGBTQI+ rights, a perspective that was supported by the other panellists. The

context for Latin America is not much different to Africa, with political polarisation, and politicisation of LGBTQI+. **All panellists appeared to be in agreement that CSOs have really stepped up during COVID, but that many are now exhausted, and need support.**

4 It was discussed that **attacks on LGBTQI+ are not new, but that they are different**. For example the Uganda Anti-homosexuality Act targets not only LGBTQI+ individuals, but allies, and organisations. This leads to wider repercussions: increased homelessness, public health clinics closing down – an unsustainable situation where any association with LGBTQI+ becomes too risky. **The threats are evolving constantly (social media alone has created all sorts of new threats)**, and it is important for funding mechanisms and the organisations to be able to keep up and think strategically about meeting those threats.

5 It is also **important to broaden the idea of “security” for LGBTQI+ to “protection, well-being, and collective care with a feminist lens”**. Living and working in crisis mode and under constant threat often leads to burnout, for example. Well-being discussions are often far too limited in scope, focused on access issues (access to therapy, healthcare and so on) but the issues are much broader and more basic than this: can organisations pay staff salaries and rents, will they be evicted from their premises, etc.

What governments can do –the importance of capacity building, core funding, and political pressure

6 **All CSO representatives emphasised the importance of governments providing support for capacity building, to develop operational capacity and technical skills within their organisations.** This can include leadership training, monitoring and evaluation skills, research capabilities, and budget monitoring skills. CSOs need support for a diverse range of capacity-building activities in order to equip them with a comprehensive skill set, and to be able to tailor capacity building to their specific needs, goals, and objectives.

7 **Perhaps the key message expressed by CSO leaders throughout was that it is important for governments to recognize that support of LGBTQI+ rights is a long-term endeavour, which requires sustained funding. Flexible, long-term, core funding** is key to capacity building, and to building sustainable movements. The anti-right movement comes in waves, and with long-term funding, CSOs “can be better prepared for the next wave that will inevitably come in 5 years’ time”.

8 Several panellists also reflected that there is a need to increase the **flexibility of funding**. Some organisations may not be seen as large enough or capable enough to receive funding, and “we need to find new ways to get resources to deserving organisations that may not have the size or bandwidth to easily meet the demands of funding mechanisms”. s6(b)(ii)

suggested that when directing funding to high-risk environments, governments could consider viewing funding in 3 tiers. A 1st tier, for core support, long-term funding (for organisation building, strategy development, scale-up, supporting organisations that can serve as hubs for response), a 2nd tier for smaller, identity-based or issue-based organisations (less established and not as fit for major funding mechanisms), and a 3rd tier to rapid response, to “fill in the gaps” (for example funding the re-opening of community centres in Ukraine).

9 In the second afternoon panel (*Imagining a Brighter Future: Understanding Effective Tools to Respond to Anti-Rights actors and empower LGBTQI Movements*), all panellists agreed on the **importance of governments “leading with their values”**. It is crucial to consider how funding could inadvertently go to anti-rights movements, for example, “a Christian counselling centre could soon be conducting conversion therapy”. Panellists s6(b)(ii) explained that in countries that are not democratic it is impossible to win their battles legally, thus (international) political

pressure is needed. This sentiment was expressed not only in terms of responding to domestic legislation, but regarding applying pressure to governments to live up to the international treaties and conventions they have signed.

10 **It was also suggested that governments could assist by creating spaces for CSOs to engage in or monitor government processes. Enabling inclusive, meaningful participation** is not only about creating such spaces for engagement but also about addressing barriers to engagement such as travel costs and logistical challenges.

What businesses can do

11 In contexts ^{s6(a)} where rule of law is not is not considered “a tool that can be used” by CSOs, as one panellist suggested, businesses can have a bigger role to play. ^{s6(b)(ii)} stressed that **businesses must be strengthened in their understanding of human rights and their understanding and respect of gender**. LGBTQI+ are often discriminated against in recruitment and procurement, and are at risk of dismissals due to their LGBTQI+ identities. Businesses can contribute by funding rights organisations, offering internships for LGBTQI+, and lobbying for legislation that protects LGBTQI+ from discrimination on the labour market. International businesses also have a responsibility when operating in these contexts, to publically defend their values, defend LGBTQI+ rights, and be vocal about this also to the political leaders in the countries they operate. Unfortunately, many CSOs felt that for most companies, “what makes most sense is saying nothing about it”. There is a particular responsibility for companies that provide a platform where hate speech is spread, (such as X and Facebook): “there must be consequences for this”.

LGBTQI+ data

12 **CSO leaders stressed the need for LGBTQI+ data – it has a crucial importance in advocacy work**, and governments and businesses can support CSO access to data and information relevant to their focus areas. This can include creating tools for data analysis, offering access to online resources, and providing guides or toolkits on engaging with the media. ^{s6(b)(ii)} own efforts in collection of data on the number of crimes committed against LBQ women in Mali: corrective rape, forced marriages and births, other forms of violence, loss of employment and education, explaining that: **“data is needed support survivors of gender based violence, to educate, and to prevent discrimination and violence”**. ^{s6(b)(ii)} also added that education is needed on so many fronts: education of police, health care staff, legal staff, as well as comprehensive, inclusive sexual education in schools with the aim of eliminating all gender based violence.

Empowering LGBTQI+ movements: resourcing, safe spaces, countering harmful narratives

13 ^{s6(b)(ii)} considered that it is not necessarily advocacy strategies that need to be changed, rather they need adequate resourcing so that the work can continue. **Investing in leaders and community members, education funds, and preparing people to take critical roles**, is all part of empowering the movement long-term. **Creating safety nets within communities**, which queer businesses can help with, and creating safe spaces for grassroots engagement with religious leaders would be helpful in the African context, suggested ^{s6(b)(ii)} It is also important to counter the narrative around “the West pushing homosexuality on us” ^{s6(a)}

as well as “decolonizing the concept of family”.

“The nuclear family is not African”, and yet it is being used to justify oppression of LGBTQI+ Africans, ^{s6(b)(ii)} The backlash on LGBTQI+ rights is in response to their increased visibility, and successes. But, it is important now, “not to go underground”, but rather to increase visibility even further, cooperate with media and private sector when possible, and work to counter dominant

harmful narratives. Beyond organisations, panellists felt that it was **important to amplify the voice of LGBTQI+ persons “in the right rooms and positions”** (not necessarily working within LGBTQI+ space) across a wide range of issues. (“Why not promote ‘LGBTQI+ voices against climate change’, for instance?”)

GEF Day 2. Internal GEF Partnership Discussion

14 **Day 2 commenced with** s6(b)(ii)

Gaps in the Pacific for SOGIESC Communities. s6(b)(ii)

presenting on Needs and

Australia was stepping up its international engagement on and funding for LGBTQIA+ equality, as announced by Foreign Minister Penny Wong during Sydney World Pride in March this year. s6(a)

s6(b)(ii)

s6(b)(ii)

GEF Partners Update and Planning for next year’s meeting

s6(b)(ii)

s6(b)(ii)

18 The group then discussed the November 2024 GEF meeting, and the consensus was that this should be attached to the Marginalized Populations Stakeholder Meeting in South Africa already planned for that November, for travel efficiencies.

Corporate Engagement

19 s6(b)(ii) presented on their engagement with GEF. s6(b)(ii) is in its process of joining, and spoke about the experiences of LGBTQI+ travelers and how they are often concerned about their personal safety and security when travelling. s6(b)(ii) have also launched inclusive hospitality training for their staff. s6(b)(ii) a member of GEF, provides pro bono legal services and tool kits for LGBTQI+ activists and CSOs under their human rights work stream. s6(b)(ii) then reinforced the message that **the fund needs more private co-operation to assist with its work.**

Meetings with Counterparts

20 On arrival in Stockholm, Ambassador Wall met with s9(2)(a) **Director, LGBTQIA+ Equality and Inclusion Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.** The meeting focused on co-presenting on the second day of the conference about Australia and New Zealand's work in the Pacific to support the recognition of the Human Rights of LGBTQIA+ peoples in the region, and how investment supports the eradication of discrimination and violence. They also discussed the upcoming round table organized by the Government of French Polynesia on the theme: "Our Voices, Our Rights and our Pacific Way", November 7-8, 2023, in Papeete, French Polynesia, and our engagement with the Vatican. s6(b)(i)

The Australian Embassy showed their support by hosting a reception to welcome GEF meeting attendees following the day 1 sessions.

21 Ambassador Wall had dinner with s9(2)(a) **U.S. Special Envoy** to advance the Human Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) Persons, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, Department of State. The meeting focused on opportunities for collaboration in 2024. s6(a)

- s6(a)

22 During the margins of the GEF meeting **Ambassador Wall met with s9(2)(a) Special Envoy for Feminist Foreign Policy and Director for Human Rights, German Federal Foreign Office.**

They discussed initiatives related to Germany being Co-Chair of the Equal Rights Coalition and noted:

- Berlin will likely host the ERC meeting 25-26 July 2024. Mexico has recently advised that due to elections they cannot host the ERC conference. This timing would enable participation in Christopher Street Day (CSD) a celebration and demonstration held for the rights of LGBTQ+ people, and against discrimination and exclusion. It is Germany's counterpart to Gay Pride or Pride Parades.
- The **vacancy of Chair on the ERC National Laws and Policies Committee** was discussed. Ambassador Wall acknowledged Germany's encouragement to New Zealand to nominate for this role. (Comment: BER has advised its contacts that we are not in a position to take on further engagement on LGBTQIA+ rights at this time).
- With ILGA World being selected as the Secretariat for the ERC it was noted the need for ERC members to contribute an annual fee to support the work of the Secretariat. Ambassador Wall asked about the formula to determine country contributions, but this is not yet designed. Germany would appreciate any contribution to Secretariat support.

23 **Ambassador Wall met with SIDA and US representatives who work on LGBTQI+ matters following the GEF forum.** s6(b)(i)

- SIDA reviewed project design for development projects, noting that it was important to consider underrepresented groups in project design and measurement of this should be a mandatory field while reporting on project outcomes.
- SIDA then discussed its mentorship programme for LGBTQI+ identifying people in developing countries and its success in developing leaders.
- The discussion concluded with the need for core rather than project-to-project support for organisational stability, and the need for better data and analysis.

24 **Ambassador Wall met with Swedish Ambassador for Gender Equality Sofia Calltorp**, who was eager to learn more about New Zealand's priorities and about the Pacific context for equality and LGBTQI+ issues following the GEF forum on day 2.

- s6(a)

s6(a)

25 Before her departure Ambassador Wall was able to meet with s9(2)(a) President of the Stockholm Sámi Association, and s9(2)(a) who is responsible for gender and LGBTQI+ questions at the Sámi association. s9(2)(a) **felt that LGBTQI+ issues is not something that Sámi discuss.** Sámi people still struggle to self-identify as indigenous, due to their experience over many years of racism, oppression, and assimilation. Ambassador Wall described the New Zealand and Pacific contexts and her work with Reo Taketake, and reindigenising the language of LGBTQI+. This initiative was received very positively, and s9(2)(a) were interested in learning more and collaborating with New Zealand on this topic. s6(a)

TAKAPU – COMMENT

26 The current geopolitical landscape and evidence of less inclusive politics in many countries is presenting many challenges for SOGIESC rights. Our main takeaway was that it is critical for likeminded partners to continue to actively support SOGIESC rights, and that New Zealand and the wider Pacific have much to offer in this space.

27 This was made clear throughout the meeting. GEF partners received Ambassador Wall very warmly and enthusiastically many times, along with Spain, as the newest members of the fund. Australia also received special mentions for its increased commitment and funding which was announced at World Pride in Sydney in March. There was keen interest to learn about New Zealand and Australian perspectives, and to learn about LGBTQI+ in the Pacific region.

28 There also appears to be an appetite from Swedish and other colleagues to learn more about the Pacific context for equality and LGBTQI+ rights, and to collaborate with New Zealand in this space. Particularly the Sámi Association saw an opportunity to engage with and learn from New Zealand's work on Reo taketake, s6(a), s6(b)(i)

MUTU - ENDS