Open Letter
To the Commonwealth Secretary-General
Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
Pall Mall
London
SW1Y 5HX

RE: Strong concern at Uganda’s treatment of human rights defenders

Dear Secretary-General,

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, condemn the Ugandan police raid on a technical training workshop organised by East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) human rights defenders on 18 June 2012.

We are also gravely concerned by the Ugandan government’s move to ban 38 non-governmental organisations that they claim work on LGBTI issues. These actions reflect a pattern of suppression against human rights defenders in Uganda. In February this year, similar action was taken, when a government minister shut down a workshop on LGBTI issues in Entebbe, Uganda. Discrimination, harassment and the restriction of civil society space are against Commonwealth values.

As the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth we call upon you to take note of this and use your Good Offices to emphasise the need for Uganda to withdraw its ban on NGOs. We also would like you to urge the Ugandan government to desist from intimidating LGBTI human rights defenders.

The space for human rights defenders in Uganda is under threat. For instance, the Public Order Management Bill 2011, currently before the Ugandan Parliament, places restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly contrary to international standards. The Bill adopts a broad definition of public meetings and requires organisers to seek permission from the police before holding such a meeting. It places an onerous burden by requiring organisers to pay compensation for any loss caused by the meeting. In addition, it grants the police a broad discretion to refuse permission for a public meeting. The Bill also allows the police to use firearms in situations where such use of force may not be justifiable. This legislation, if passed, would significantly impede freedom of assembly.

Furthermore we are gravely concerned by the fact that Uganda still has a Bill pending in its Parliament that calls for severe restrictions on both adult consensual same-sex activity and support for LGBTI human rights defenders.
We urge the Commonwealth Secretary-General to make it clear to the Ugandan government that if such legislation were to be passed it would breach Commonwealth values and Uganda’s international obligations.

Lastly we call on the Commonwealth to closely monitor developments in Uganda and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to take note of recent developments there that are in breach of the Commonwealth’s fundamental values.

Sincerely,

Maja Daruwala  
Director  
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

Katsuji Imata  
Acting Secretary General  
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation