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Mr Midnight Poonkasetwattana
Executive Director
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8 October 2020

Dear Mr Poonkasetwattana,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated 24 August 2020, which you sent on behalf of numerous signatories. I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to highlight the situation that LGBTQI communities face in Asia and the Pacific in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The work undertaken to understand the situation through community surveys and grassroots outreach is impressive. Community evidence, surveys and feedback are vital tools in strengthening our responses.

The World Health Organization (WHO), together with the broader United Nations system, is committed to combatting the significant health disparities faced by LGBTQI populations and to acknowledging and addressing the diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics in our work on health, wellbeing and the right to health.

COVID-19 is a global health challenge impacting everyone and all communities require access to services that promote and protect their health. WHO is committed to strengthening collaboration with the broad spectrum of civil society and community organizations, including those representing LGBTQI populations. I have established regular dialogues with civil society organizations to explore how we can improve engagement with civil society and protect civic space to ensure achievement of universal health coverage, especially within the context of COVID-19.

We are also elaborating a CSO engagement strategy to strengthen WHO's engagement with civil society at global, regional and country level. Strong relationships with the LGBTQI communities already exist in the context of our work on HIV, sexual and reproductive health, gender and universal health coverage - yet we can and must strive to extend this focus to all aspects of health.

We need to ensure all voices on how to best respond to the pandemic and deliver needed health services are heard. Health is a right for all people and we all must come together in the face of COVID-19 to ensure health promotion and life-saving services are available to everyone.

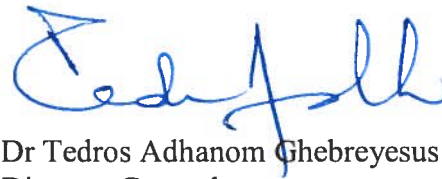
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In recent months WHO has prioritized and ensured that essential health services are maintained during this crisis. We note the considerable efforts to reach key populations, including men who have sex with men and transgender people by, for example, providing essential HIV services including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and prevention and treatment services.

Rest assured that we have heard your important message and, as we update our guidance and approach to COVID-19, we will ensure that the specific challenges of LGBTQI communities will be recognized and addressed.

With my very best
personal regards &
appreciation

Yours sincerely,



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General