



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

5th July 2021, Port of Spain
Contact: Angelique V Nixon, Director
Phone: +868-732-3543

CAISO calls Catholic Archbishop Gordon’s Statement Harmful, Dangerous and Unfounded

CAISO stands with LGBTIQ+ communities in the face of continued religious intolerance and denial of our humanity. We strongly condemn the hypocrisy and double standard articulated by the Catholic Archbishop of Trinidad and Tobago (reported by Janelle De Souza in *Newsday*, July 4, 2021) that promotes intolerance, hate, and misinformation.

The Catholic position that non-straight people should be “accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity” but that the “homosexual condition” is “unnatural and sinful” diminishes the humanity of thousands of Catholics around the world who identify as LGBTIQ+. Arguably, the Church’s denial of the sexuality of some of its priests is unnatural and its continued cover-up of sexual crimes perpetrated by clerics, is sinful. Further, the assertion that “gender ideology is diabolical”, and “a lie that should not be supported by Christians” is not only harmful and dangerous, but also unfounded.

While the Book of Genesis may be the source of Catholic teaching on sex, it is at odds with scientific studies of sex and gender and the reality of people’s lived experiences. Often used interchangeably, sex and gender are, in fact, two different concepts. Sex refers to characteristics that are biologically defined. Gender is a social construction relating to behaviours and attributes based on labels of masculinity and femininity.

While sex and gender are both generally referred to in two distinct categories (binary) - male and female or man and woman - roughly 2% of the world’s population is born with hormones, chromosomes, anatomy or other characteristics that are neither exclusively male nor female (sometimes known as intersex). Intersex people are often given surgeries to “correct” these variations in their sex characteristics. There is growing support within the medical professions and clear demands by intersex activists, to end these invasive, “corrective” surgeries and grant intersex persons the right to choose what is done to their bodies. These experiences are “rooted in reality”: they are not lies or the work of the Devil!

Contrary to Archbishop Gordon’s assertion that gender theory is a ‘neo-colonial tool’, anthropologists, cultural studies scholars, historians, scientists, spiritual leaders and more, have affirmed and confirmed the existence of more than two genders that were/are accepted, embraced and celebrated as natural, among many cultures (especially African, Asian, and Indigenous), prior to colonialism.

The term ‘gender identity’ was coined in 1964 by American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Robert Stoller, to refer to an individual’s personal concept about their gender and how they feel inside, in recognition of the fact that the gender category with which a person identifies may not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Hence, gender is increasingly recognised as not binary but on a spectrum that includes transgender and gender non-conforming people.

Ironically (and hypocritically), while intersex babies are “corrected” through surgeries without their consent, adult trans people seeking gender-affirming surgery must go through protocols and psychological tests and prove they are capable of making decisions about their bodies.

Going against societal norms and expectations of gender and sexuality can be agonising. “Switching genders” is not something that anyone takes lightly or just wakes up one morning and decides. Trans and gender-non-conforming people may experience serious trials and tribulations in accepting who they are, and how they feel in their bodies, because of rigid and harmful gender norms reinforced in their lives every day.

Akilah Riley-Richardson, a clinical social worker and certified clinical trauma professional, affirms the above, and shares the need for us all to acknowledge the psychosocial dynamics and challenges that feature for persons who are gender non-conforming. There is a degree of sensitivity that is required to help persons to not only discover the truth of who they are, but also to affirm it.

In her work, as Clinical Administrator with CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice Programme, Riley-Richardson says: “I have sat with persons who attempted suicide because of the pain of living in a body that they did not feel was their own. I have had to bear witness to unimaginable emotional trauma. I believe that we need to hold that trauma with compassion and not judgement.”

The Wholeness and Justice Programme was developed by CAISO to respond to violations and discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ persons living in Trinidad and Tobago, and to offer clinical and legal support. The programme focuses especially on trans, intersex and gender non-confirming persons because of the levels of violence and discrimination they experience daily, within families and communities, as well as public spaces.

If, as Archbishop Gordon affirms, sex and gender are so natural or simply biological, then why are there so many rules - religious and secular - that attempt to govern and even police identities, attractions, and behaviours? ‘Deviance’ - as we learn from the Social Sciences - is predicated on norms established and deployed by ‘authority’ to achieve the goal of conformity and control. CAISO asserts that gender binaries are colonial and neo-colonial tools used to control us and dictate what and how we should act and behave.

CAISO stands firmly against the continued structural violence perpetuated by religious institutions. We refuse to let the Church or anyone deny our existence and the complexity of our lives. We know, from our work with trans and gender non-conforming people, the deep hardship in acknowledging who you are and how you identify, particularly when it conflicts with social and family expectations, and how the world might see you. LGBTQI+ people in this country remain acutely vulnerable to physical and emotional abuse and trauma, housing and job insecurity, and a continued lack of legal protections and recognition of fundamental rights. This cannot continue as every person, regardless of creed, race, gender identity, or sexuality, ought to find an equal place in Trinidad and Tobago.

CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice is a feminist Civil Society Organisation committed to ensuring wholeness, justice and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago’s LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) communities, by developing analysis, alliances and advocacy. The CAISO **Wholeness and Justice** programme is committed to responding to violations against Intersex, Trans, Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay (ITBLG+) community members and to deliver clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience. **For more information, visit caisott.org or email us at info@caisott.org.**

[END]