

Sri Lankan President should retract homophobic remarks!

Sirisena Should Be Held Responsible For Homophobic Incidents In Sri Lanka In Coming Days: Sri Lankan LGBTQI+ Community

Thursday 26 September 2019, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [GAMAGE Mahela](#) (Date first published: 6 November 2018).

The LGBTQI community in Sri Lanka strongly condemned the controversial statement by President Maithripala Sirisena and said it was an act of using homophobia to amuse his political gallery.

“By trivialising homophobia in this fashion, President Sirisena should be held responsible for any [homophobic](#) incidents that Sri Lankan citizens may experience in the coming days,” the LGBTQI+ community said, in a statement today.

The full statement issued by them is as follows:

Statement by the Sri Lankan LGBTQI+ community and allies on President Sirisena’s homophobic comments at a public rally, 5 November 2018

At a public rally held on Monday 5 November 2018, President Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka made a series of homophobic comments (<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/?s=LGBTQ>). The President, who was in a Joint Government with the United National Front (UNF) led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, categorically stated that Mr Wickremesinghe rejected national values and had entered a “butterfly life” [“samanala jeevithaya” in Sinhala], which implies a queer lifestyle. Sirisena then commented that key decisions of government were made not by the President nor by party seniors but by Mr Wickremesinghe and his “butterfly caucus” [“samanala rela” in Sinhala]. These comments were met with laughter and applause by those gathered on stage beside Sirisena, including Mahinda Rajapaksa who was appointed as Prime Minister by Sirisena.

As members of the Sri Lankan LGBTQI+ community, we categorically condemn this homophobia openly promoted by the elected head of state of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. This statement makes it clear that President Sirisena has absolutely no notion or commitment whatsoever for the fundamental rights and human dignity of all Sri Lankans. It is particularly disappointing coming from a President elected on the votes of many members of the Sri Lankan LGBTQI+ community who saw his candidacy as a respite from the rampant homophobia of the preceding Rajapaksa presidency.

We also wish to reiterate that the accusation that the UNF was run by an LGBTQI+ agenda is wildly inaccurate. We have experienced the UNF’s own efforts to keep fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ Sri Lankans rights at bay, and to ignore the pleas of non-cisnormative and non-heteronormative Sri Lankan citizens to ensure their fundamental rights. The UNF’s Minister of Justice, to cite but one example, was reluctant to even provide a courtesy call appointment for a delegation of LGBTQI+ professionals, in the aftermath of the Indian Supreme Court’s progressive decision to repeal Section

377 of the Indian Penal Code. Had the UNF actually been led by an LGBTQI+ agenda, Sections 365 and 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code would by now be repealed, and equality irrespective of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity/Expression and/or Sex Characteristics [SOGIESC] would have been enshrined in the Constitution.

President Sirisena's statement is therefore a clear case of misinformation, and misleading his own party and supporters. We condemn his use of homophobia to amuse his political gallery. By trivialising homophobia in this fashion, President Sirisena should be held responsible for any homophobic incidents that Sri Lankan citizens may experience in the coming days.

We call upon all Sri Lankans who respect the fundamental rights of each and every Sri Lankan for equality, justice and dignity to join with us in categorically condemning President Sirisena's homophobia and public incitement of homophobic hatred.

An Open Letter To President Sirisena By A Young "Samanala" Sri Lankan

I was going home after work when a friend messaged me [with Sirisena's latest statement](#).

Having read the caption, I read and rewatched it. The caption hadn't prepared me enough for what I had just watched. I'm not going to go into detail or dwell into what was said because all of us would have seen it multiple times by now.

Let me first reiterate that this is not a statement supporting [Ranil Wickremesinghe](#). I'm no fan of him. Neither am I a fan of [Mahinda Rajapaksa](#) or you, Mr. President. I'm fed up of the political system that is easily bought and sold to the highest bidder these days.

Back to you Mr. President. You could have attacked Ranil W on his policy decisions or his inaction during his tenure. But no, Mr. President, the almighty protector of this nation's culture of two thousand and five hundred years decided to stoop lower when we thought you couldn't go any lower. You decided to call Ranil a පුංචි පුංචි, a derogatory term to address someone who's gay. You referred to Ranil and his gang as his පුංචි පුංචි, a swarm of butterflies, because when you have ways to demean people why not use all of what's possible casting civility aside.

Our culture is supposed to be one of tolerance not one of intolerance and ridicule.

Words have consequences Mr. President, people in this country voted for you to protect the rights of every citizen. Not just a certain group of people. But let me reiterate, every citizen. I didn't vote for you because I was too young to have voted for you when the presidential election was held but if my memory proves right you were elected on a mandate to safeguard the rights of EVERY citizen. But no, you decided to go and bash a whole group of individuals because of a grudge you hold against a previous political bedfellow of yours. It's sad to see a President that should represent every one of the country's citizens sink this low.

I'm young. Yes. But I've gone through the bullying. The teasing. The endless nights crying and cutting myself because I hated myself, because of statements and ridicule that the society in general directed at me. I'm a "grown-up" now and a proud, strong butterfly. But let's remember that there are other young people, much younger than me who'll look at your comments and the people cheering you on and egging your statements on. Drawing pleasure from your ridicule of the perceived sexuality of RW and his advisors and ministers in his inner circle.

The very act of ridiculing someone based on their sexuality is downright appalling to say the least.

We need to make Sri Lanka safe for everyone. That's how we grow. Stronger. Together.

But your words today will have proven to the younger generation that Sri Lanka isn't open to accept them. That their own President sees them as inferior. And their sexuality as a detriment to hold positions of power. Lest we forget Alan Turing, Tim Cook, Ellen De Generes, Leo Varadkar, Arthur C. Clarke, all butterflies, ආරක්ෂා in your words Mr. President, all exemplary individuals in their own right, trailblazers for young LGBT+ people around the world. It's sad that young people here will always have to look outside for inspiration because it doesn't look like anytime soon that they will be able to fly freely, true to their self. Certainly not with a President who ridicules them for who they are.

God knows when we'll be able to tell our kids that they will be loved no matter what and to be who they are. The previous government wasn't any better for LGBT+ individuals. They didn't actively engage in bettering their social stance but at least they didn't use the LGBT+ community as a punchline to jokes in front of the whole nation.

Thank you Mr. President for your remarks for it'll only make me stronger.

To fellow young LGBT individuals, don't let this affect your perception of yourself. You are as valid as any other human being capable of achieving everything you dream for yourself. Don't let words stop you in your tracks. Always keep marching forward. That's how we'll all become stronger.

**Mahela is a volunteer at Hashtag Generation and a young advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights for all*

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<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sirisena-should-be-held-responsible-for-homophobic-incidents-in-sri-lanka-in-coming-days-sri-lankan-lgbtqi-community/>

<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/an-open-letter-to-president-sirisena-by-a-young-samantala-sri-lankan/>