



September 25, 2019

His Worship The Mayor, Councillor Homer Davis
Mayor of Montego Bay
St. James Municipal Corporation
19A Union Street
Montego Bay, St. James, Jamaica

Dear Mayor Davis,

We wish to express our support for Montego Bay Pride and all Jamaicans' rights to freedom of thought, expression and peaceful assembly and to seek and share information and opinions freely. These are fundamental rights which governments should not have the ability to restrict, so we were deeply disappointed to read your recent statement opposing Montego Bay Pride's organizing. Your words have had a chilling effect on the local community and the image of Montego Bay for Jamaicans and visitors, alike.

As a human rights organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of marginalized people in Jamaica, specifically LGBTQ people, Montego Bay Pride works to reduce stigma, empower the local community and improve the lives of LGBTQ people. In the coming weeks, Montego Bay Pride would, under different circumstances, be celebrating Pride for its fifth year in a row with a week of panels, movie screenings, and faith services with over 3,000 participants. In fitting with this year's planned theme of "Let Love Live," organizers intended to hold a public discussion on same-sex marriage in Jamaica on October 16 at the Montego Bay Cultural Centre.

Unfortunately, these activities will not take place this year. Organizers were compelled to cancel Montego Bay Pride after your dangerous and disturbing statement opposing organizers' use of the Cultural Centre and the right of the community to engage in an open discussion about LGBTQ rights. Following your words, it has been reported that local businesses felt pressured into disassociating themselves from Montego Bay Pride, and law enforcement determined it could no longer adequately ensure the protection of Pride participants.

On September 12, you claimed that the St. James Municipal Corporation, the local governing body, is bound to uphold the Constitution of Jamaica and, therefore, cannot host an event that would include a discussion on same-sex marriage at a public space such as the Cultural Centre. All Jamaicans have rights to freedom of assembly, expression, and information, and we urge you to respect these rights, as they are enshrined in the nation's constitution. There is simply nothing untoward with engaging in a conversation about whether Jamaica is ready for same-sex marriage. To this point, we note that as Pride organizers hoped to develop a dialogue with the community about same-sex marriage, the Jamaican government will be preparing and presenting a response to the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights the very day before explaining its position on the same topic.

In your statement, you also described the Cultural Centre as sacred in its connection to the evolving movement for equal rights in Jamaica. We believe that this event is entirely in fitting with the Centre's storied history and the continued struggle for full and equal rights for all Jamaicans.

Despite the cancellation of Pride in Montego Bay, we wish to add our voice to those of other human rights organizations that have expressed similar concerns about your actions to restrict and undermine the work of organizers. We urge you to respect the rights of all Jamaicans, including organizers of Montego Bay Pride, to freedom of speech, assembly, expression and information and welcome you to reconsider your prior statements and ensure Montego Bay Pride and the local LGBTQ community that you will, instead, support them as they exercise these rights in celebrating Pride.

Sincerely,



Jay Gilliam
Director of Global
Human Rights Campaign

CC:

Prime Minister, The Most Honourable Andrew Holness
The Minister of Foreign Affairs, The Honourable Kamina Johnson-Smith
The Attorney General, The Honourable Marlene Malahoo-Forte
The Minister of Justice, The Honourable Delroy Chuck
The Minister of Tourism, The Honourable Edmund Bartlett
The Minister of Local Government, The Honourable Desmond McKenzie