



**PRIDE IN PROGRESS:
A ROADMAP TO ENDING
LGBT CRIMINALISATION
STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2029**

Human
Dignity
Trust

WE USE THE LAW TO DEFEND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF LGBT PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

ABOUT US

At the Human Dignity Trust, we envision a world in which LGBT people are free to live their authentic lives without fear of prosecution and persecution.

We are the only organisation working globally to eradicate laws that criminalise LGBT people, and to curtail other forms of repression that these iniquitous laws enable. We provide technical legal and communications assistance to local partners around the world, including litigants, lawyers, human rights activists and governments.

As of July 2024, there are 63 jurisdictions that make consensual same-sex sexual intimacy a criminal offence. In many cases, these laws are a legacy of 19th century British colonial penal codes. Of the 56 countries of the Commonwealth, 50% still criminalise LGBT people. That represents almost half of all criminalising jurisdictions around the world. In other places, anti-LGBT laws derive from religious codes.

Working closely with local lawyers and activists, we support strategic litigation to challenge these laws as a violation of constitutional and international human rights law. Often these criminal laws are used to repress LGBT people in other ways—such as to deny their freedom of association, or to subject them to invasive medical procedures, supposedly to gather evidence of same-sex sexual conduct. We support cases challenging those abuses, as well. We also provide technical assistance to governments that choose to reform

Cover image: Evgeny Timofeyev/
istockphoto.com

their sexual offence legislation and enact protective measures, and we assist local activists seeking to engage in law reform efforts to eliminate laws that marginalise LGBT people.

In addition to our in-house legal expertise, we work with 25 of the world's leading law firms, as well as eminent barristers, who contribute pro bono legal assistance to our efforts across five continents.

Our local partners always lead and inform our work. They set the pace to ensure that legal interventions are timely and locally relevant. Knowing that we are always stronger together, we build highly skilled international teams to achieve meaningful, measurable and sustainable legal progress. Even as they transform the lives of LGBT people, these changes also benefit other vulnerable groups and entire societies.

“My experience working with HDT has been that there is respect for local sensitivities, but also an encouragement for local people to take a lead.”

African LGBT activist



OUR TRACK RECORD

Since 2011, the Human Dignity Trust has:



Provided legal and communications technical assistance in seven countries where decriminalisation is now final



Actively worked with partners in 13 countries where decriminalisation remains the objective



Achieved two groundbreaking decisions at international tribunals that expand international law and confirm that criminalising countries are in violation of binding treaty obligations



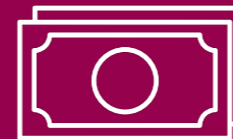
Helped secure three final, landmark court decisions upholding LGBT freedom of association and freedom from forced medical examinations



Drafted five bills for four governments, protecting LGBT people, women, children and other marginalised groups



Designed communications strategies together with partners in 15 countries, generating positive media coverage reaching tens of millions of people



Received £22m worth of pro bono legal assistance in support of our work

MISSION

To achieve a world in which LGBT people are free from criminalisation and enjoy greater protection in law, by supporting strategic human rights litigation and legal reform.

VISION

Freedom and equality for LGBT people everywhere.

VALUES

Excellence, professionalism, trust, collaboration, perseverance.

“This is a warm and hearty congratulations to the Trust for the good news we just read online [a decriminalisation judgment in Mauritius]. As Kenyan allies and organisations that have been firefighting LGBTQ homophobia here since January 2023, we are all so happy when we read of wins in Africa. This is, therefore, a thank you for giving us all hope.”

Kenyan LGBT activist

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This is a critical moment in the global effort to decriminalise consensual same-sex intimacy. We have seen immense progress since the Human Dignity Trust was founded in 2011. Then, more than 80 countries maintained these archaic criminal offences. As of July 2024, that number had dropped to 63.

Yet there is an alarming, parallel trend of new draconian laws being proposed and passed that aim to further demonise and outlaw LGBT people. Determined—and well-funded—opponents of human rights are intent on rolling back hard-won gains and fomenting repression and fear.

Victories achieved during our last strategy period show that justice can and will prevail. A sequence of three successful decriminalisation cases that we supported in the Caribbean mean there are now only five criminalising jurisdictions remaining in the Americas. A decade of concerted litigation in Singapore resulted in the government repealing the offending law. And our landmark case against Sri Lanka at the UN Women’s Committee established that criminalising same-sex intimacy between women violates the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, one of the most widely ratified international human rights treaties.

We also pioneered the effort to establish in law that constitutional prohibitions on sex discrimination include sexual orientation. This principle was a key legal basis for three major victories in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, including, most recently, a landmark decriminalisation judgment in the Supreme Court of Mauritius. In parallel, the legislative bills we help draft to reform sexual offences—and provide protection against hate-based violence—are making it easier for willing governments to promote and table progressive laws.

Our work with our outstanding local partners is more vital than ever, as we co-operate to win more victories and keep regression at bay. Our commitment to human dignity and the rule of law remains steadfast, and so, we will continue to support our partners, in both civil society and government, to eradicate the dozens of remaining laws that criminalise LGBT people, while also expanding our geographical reach and internal capacity so that our work can flourish and accelerate in this pivotal period.

In everything we do, our partners remain our beacon, steering and guiding our joint resistance to injustice as they reclaim their rights and dignity. We will strive to ensure that, in five years’ time, more people are able to live and love how they choose in peace and freedom.

Téa Braun, July 2024



PROCESS AND CONSULTATION

The Trust is grateful for the input of key funders and partners, who, in 2023, contributed feedback on our work, with an overall emphasis on how we can best achieve the goals envisaged in this strategy. This document reflects those consultations to ensure that we continue to support the priorities of the communities we serve.

“HDT has had the fortune to have good team members whose approach to partnerships is egalitarian and based on building trust and solid communication.”

LGBT activist on the Trust’s 2024–2029 Strategic Plan



HDT team, March 2024. Photo: HDT

THEORY OF CHANGE

PROBLEM

LGBT people are not free and equal everywhere due to outdated laws and inadequate protection from violence and discrimination, and some face new forms of draconian repression

BARRIER

Limited resources and technical expertise, in civil society and governments, hampers the pursuit of urgent legal change

VISION

Freedom and equality for LGBT people around the world

IMPACT

The eradication of laws that criminalise LGBT people and the enactment of laws that protect against violence and discrimination

Structural legal change is an essential part of securing the fundamental human rights of LGBT people around the world. Laws and related governmental actions that persecute and repress LGBT people violate human rights norms, while enabling and fostering the stigma, discrimination and violence to which LGBT people are too often subjected. The marginalisation of LGBT people will continue for as long as these laws exist. While legal change does not necessarily induce an immediate shift in attitudes, it can help inform and accelerate that process; crucially, it prevents states from using old, reactionary laws or new, oppressive legislation to maintain or deepen LGBT inequality.

Our core focus is the decriminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual conduct. This can come about through either courts or legislatures. In neither case is it the end of the legal journey: protective

laws are needed to further embed LGBT human rights and begin reversing centuries of stigma. Our emphasis is on legal responses to bias-motivated violence—rampant in many pre- and post-decriminalisation countries—through the introduction and implementation of hate crime laws that stiffen sentences when LGBT people, or members of other marginalised groups, become targeted victims of existing criminal offences.

Strategic litigation and legislative reform are, by definition, multi-year endeavours. The impact, however, can be enormous. The upholding of fundamental human rights through decriminalisation instantly changes the lives of tens of thousands or even millions of LGBT people for the better. It lifts the crushing burden of systemic oppression, rippling across the world to wherever LGBT rights are still compromised.

STRATEGIC HUMAN RIGHTS LITIGATION

Strategic Objective 1: Courts strike down anti-LGBT criminal laws and related practices

Laws that criminalise LGBT people or repress them in related ways are struck down and the total number of countries that maintain repressive criminal laws and practices is reduced.

We will support strategic litigation in 10 to 15 countries across all regions of the world, to strike down laws that criminalise LGBT people, including several key cases that are already before the courts.

As part of this effort, we will develop strategies and support litigation to counter the disturbing and concerted phenomenon of new, regressive anti-LGBT criminal laws.

We will continue to leverage the outstanding and unlimited heavyweight support of our pro bono legal and bar panel members, ensuring that our work to assist local activists and lawyers remains responsive and world-class.

Mindful always of the toll which the long process of strategic litigation can have on those involved, particularly individual litigants, we will provide security and wellbeing support to partners.

**“I want to thank you all for this amazing job from day one.
You’re my best support.”**

Ryan Ah Seek, Litigant, Mauritius

We will support governments in four to eight countries that seek to review and reform laws criminalising LGBT people, along with other sexual offence provisions. Supplying technical legal assistance on request, we will help bring these laws into compliance with international human rights standards.

We will also support the enactment of protective legislation—most notably hate crime laws—to help counter and address targeted forms of violence against LGBT people and other marginalised communities.

In parallel, we will support civil society groups and other stakeholders to engage with and influence law reform efforts.

We will conduct research to ensure that our publications on legislative reform are updated and remain useful tools for governments and civil society.

“The Human Dignity Trust’s stellar support for the creation of Bills to enable equal opportunities for vulnerable groups is legendary. Thank you for all that you do to improve the lives of ordinary people.”

Laura Tucker-Longworth, former Speaker of the National Assembly of Belize

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Strategic Objective 2:

Governments are equipped and well-positioned to reform sexual offence laws and enact protective legislation

Governments reform sexual offence laws that criminalise and discriminate against LGBT people and other marginalised groups and enact protective laws, reducing the number of criminalising countries and making legislation human rights-compliant.



Parliament House, Singapore, 2022. Photo: Erwin Soo.

MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Strategic Objective 3:

The public and lawmakers increasingly support decriminalisation and related legal progress

There is a favourable environment for positive change in countries where we are supporting litigation or legislative reform, or where we hope to do so. Regression and pushback are avoided, mitigated or minimised.



Journalists at the High Court of Kenya, May 2019. Photo: Marc Mukunya.

We know that legal progress is more likely when public attitudes to LGBT people are better informed and more tolerant. Always conscious that local stakeholders must control the messaging, we will provide more technical communications assistance to complement and accompany our expanding legal work.

Together with our partners, we will make sure local LGBT activists can convey the compelling human stories that are the real-life context of our joint efforts. As we pursue legal progress, we will implement hearts-and-minds campaigns to build understanding of and respect for LGBT people.

Recognising the concerted push to roll back LGBT rights in some countries—which often involves misinformation campaigns—we will work with our partners to confront this threat and counter it with strategies that foster tolerance and acceptance.

We will leverage our broad suite of authoritative research and digital products to support our work, linking them directly with our litigation and legislative reform work.

“The fact that international papers were talking about the [decriminalisation] win... the [world’s] eyes were on us, so [the government] could not afford to let any incident happen.”

LGBT activist

Drawing on our expertise, reputation for excellence, global footprint, and deep links with the worldwide LGBT human rights movement, we will contribute to international discussions on how best to protect and advance the rights of LGBT people through decriminalisation and related legal change.

In this strategic period, we will help build further support in the international community for decriminalisation and related progress. To this end, we will participate in key international, regional and inter-governmental fora, where our expertise can have an influence.

We will work to strengthen the LGBT human rights movement's ability to engage in litigation and legal reform initiatives, and its readiness to pursue them. We will convene experts from civil society, the legal profession and politics so that they can share good practice and build strategies to accelerate decriminalisation and related change.

We will continue to contribute to networks relevant to our mission, mobilising our intellectual and human resources to support their work and impact.

“I did not have a clear idea why this legislation is important and how it can help address challenges LGBTIQ people face, but the convening has helped me to understand and see the need for such legislation.”

Participant, HDT convening on hate crimes

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ADVOCACY

Strategic Objective 4:

There is international awareness of and support for decriminalisation and related legal progress

Regional and international actors are aware of the current situation and ongoing issues regarding LGBT criminalisation and related legal issues, and civil society has improved access to the technical resources it needs to advocate for change.



United Nations, Geneva. Photo: UN Photo/Jean-Marco Ferré.

OPERATIONAL STRENGTHENING

Strategic Objective 5:

Our internal capacity, systems and support for staff are robust and enable our teams to thrive

The Trust has improved internal capacity, systems and structures to ensure our operations are efficient, responsive and impact-driven and that we have a strong and diverse staff complement who feel supported to flourish.

To help an ever-increasing number of partners make legal progress around the world, we must match our ambition with sustained capacity to deliver.

To do this with maximum impact, we will build our presence in the regions in which we work. We will include team members who are closer to our partners and to the issues that affect them. This will enable us to have deeper knowledge of the environments in which we operate and to be even more agile and responsive.

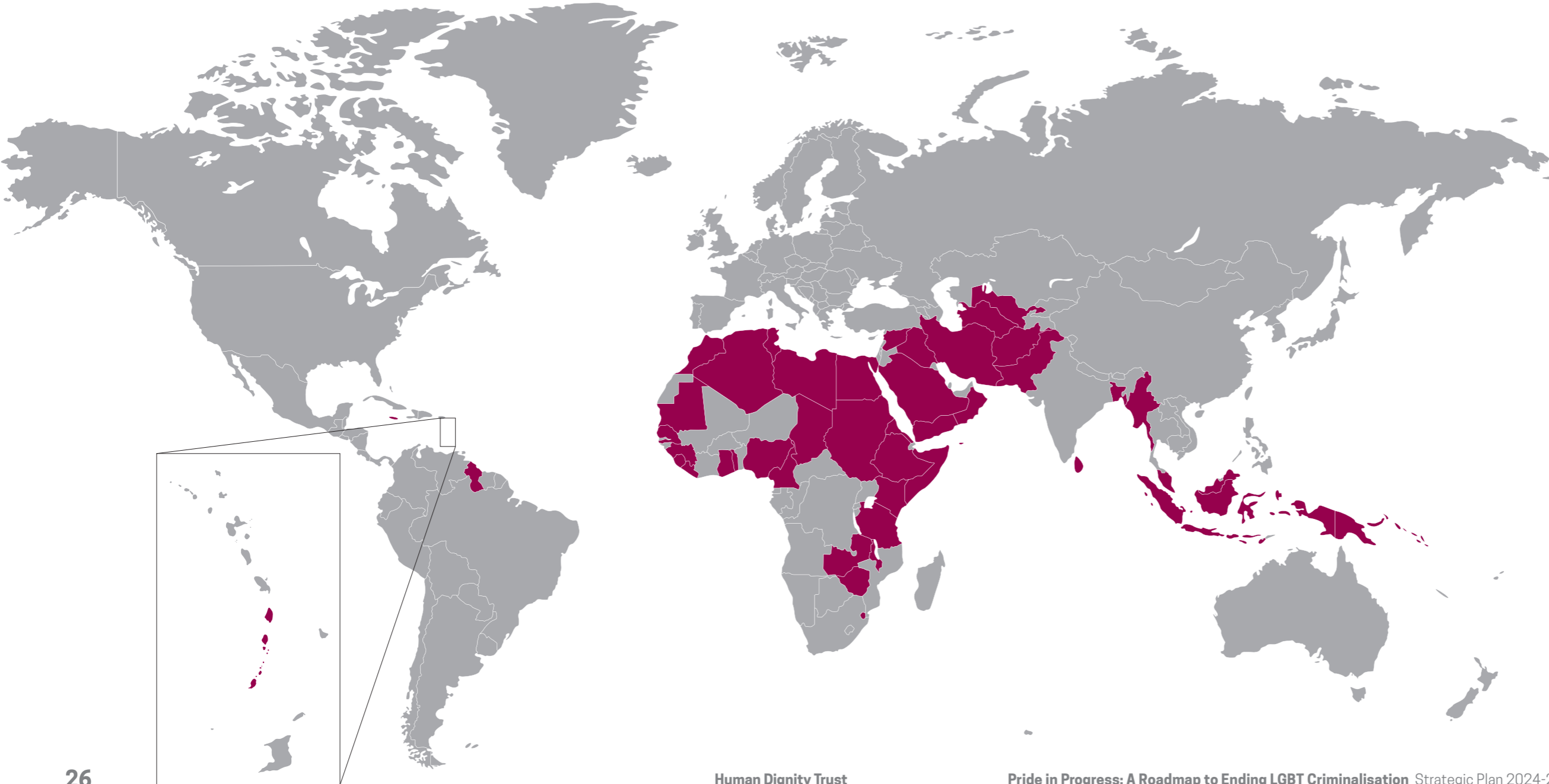
We will continue to boost the strength and diversity of our teams—guaranteeing that our work is accessible to, and informed by, people with a range of backgrounds and life experiences, and that it reflects the variety of communities and geographies we serve.

We will ensure our support functions provide the internal capacity and systems to manage our growing operations effectively, across areas such as finance, human resources, IT, travel, monitoring, evaluation and learning—thereby allowing our technical teams to focus on what they do best, alongside our local partners.

“Mindful of the economic challenges of the post-pandemic world, we will continue to innovate to ensure that our staff—the lifeblood of our organisation and the heart of our success—are able to thrive. We will review our internal policies to ensure that we remain at the leading edge within our sector.”

Téa Braun, Chief Executive, Human Dignity Trust

Map of Jurisdictions that Criminalise LGBT People



-
- **63** jurisdictions criminalise same-sex intimacy between men
 - **40** jurisdictions criminalise same-sex intimacy between women
 - **12** jurisdictions impose the death penalty
 - **29** are Commonwealth jurisdictions
-
- More than **70 million LGBT people** worldwide live in countries where they **could be imprisoned** just for consensual sexual conduct consistent with who they are
-
- **The Human Dignity Trust** will work in a third of the world's criminalising countries
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I AM NOT
YOUR
SCAPEGOAT

LGBTQIA+
EQUAL RIGHTS
NOW

MY EXISTENCE
IS
NON-NEGOTIABLE

Started in 1533
Still fighting 2023
#Decolonise Sexuality

ME
BEING MY
TRUE
SELF

WE ARE NOT
CRIMINALS

PLACE
EVERYONE

EQUALITY
RIGHTS
AND JUSTICE
FOR ALL

Litigants from decriminalisation cases in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean marching with HDT staff at Pride in London, June 2023. Photo: Bex Wade

GET INVOLVED



Donate

More than 60 countries still criminalise LGBT people. Help us bring that number down:
www.humandignitytrust.org/donate



Research

Use our map to learn more about the criminalisation of LGBT people:
www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation

Learn about the human rights compliance of sexual offence laws in the Commonwealth: www.humandignitytrust.org/reform

Research how the law can be used to defend the rights of LGBT people:
www.humandignitytrust.org/hdt-resources



Stay in touch

Sign up to our newsletter for updates on key legal challenges to anti-LGBT laws around the world, news on the reform of discriminatory laws, and commentary from our Chief Executive on landmark judgments:
www.humandignitytrust.org/newsletter-signup

“We are delighted to support the Human Dignity Trust. Its work is highly strategic, impactful, and always attuned to local contexts and needs. One of HDT’s strengths is its thoughtful engagement with local partners, resulting in lasting change that is not only about the law, but also about the lived experience of LGBTQI people.”

Nina Spataru, Oak Foundation

“The Trust is refreshing to have as a partner; its strengths are well-honed strategies and clear-cut approaches, which have tangible impact.”

Isadora Amal, Luminare



Human Dignity Trust

4th Floor West - Quality House
5-9 Quality Court, Chancery Lane
London WC2A 1HP
United Kingdom

administrator@humandignitytrust.org

[**www.humandignitytrust.org**](http://www.humandignitytrust.org)

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