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## Top 10 LGBT Accomplishments in 2013

There have been many highs and lows for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Jamaicans this year. Despite the challenges faced by LGBT people, including homelessness, mob attacks and the murder of 16-year-old Dwayne Jones, we have made strides to improve the lives of community members.

We take this opportunity to highlight some of the positive things that happened in 2013 that have made an impact on our sustained efforts to promote the rights of LGBT Jamaicans.

Here are the top ten achievements (in no particular order):

### 1. We Are Jamaicans

In January 2013, J-FLAG launched the We Are Jamaicans campaign (on YouTube) to allow LGBT Jamaicans and allies to talk about LGBT identity, community, and rights, as well as discrimination and violence.

For the first time in our history, there was a campaign with several LGBT Jamaicans openly sharing their personal experiences living in Jamaica and humanising what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Participants included Tiana Miller, Staceyann Chin, Cecile Burrows, Nicolette Bryan, Dr. Carolyn Gomes, Keriann Lee, Rev Garth Minott and Pat Wright. The campaign generated much excitement among a wide cross section of people and was a source of hope for the LGBT community, their families and friends.

The campaign was expanded in August to include LGBT people and allies in Canada and USA. Over 40 videos have been uploaded and they have been viewed over 130,000 times on YouTube. The Huffington Post named the campaign as one of the ten best LGBT moments in the week of January 13 to 20. It was also featured in Caribbean Beat, the inflight magazine for Caribbean Airlines.

### 2. Constitutional Challenge to the Buggery Law

In an unprecedented move, AIDS-Free World filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the buggery law on behalf of Javed Jaghai in June, 2013. Javed, who is a well known and celebrated gay rights activist, is also an alumnus of the prestigious Dartmouth College and is currently a PhD candidate at Yale University. He was working with J-FLAG as Education & Outreach Officer at the time of filing the challenge.

The case has garnered a lot of support from scores of Jamaicans and a number of civil society organisations. In addition to J-FLAG being joined as a co-claimant on September 3, Caribbean Dawn, a women's rights organisation, was joined as an interested party in October. Regrettably, the application from Jamaicans for Justice to similarly join as interested party was denied but we continue to share their full support for this initiative as well as that of the broader civil society coalition. Chris Breyer, Professor at John Hopkins University, was added as an expert witness for the claimant. Case management and other administrative activities will be ongoing throughout the next twelve months and trial is set to begin in November 2014.

### 3. Government Takes A Stand Against Hate Music/Speech

In August, the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture expressed regret in its response to an unfortunate event involving an artiste's use of the Independence Grand Gala to make anti-gay statements.

The Ministry declared that: *"...the comments by the artiste were inappropriate in the setting of a national, state-funded event with more than 20,000 persons, including children, who were in the National Stadium and thousands more watching on television and online."*



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There was also a commitment to review the system of contractual engagement of artistes and suppliers for national events as well as improving quality control to ensure there is no recurrence.

#### **4. Ministry of National Security Conducts Research among LGBT Jamaicans**

As promised in 2012, the Ministry of National Security (MNS) expanded the 2013 Jamaica National Crime Victimization Survey (JNCVS) to include questions about crimes believed to result from assumptions or knowledge about the sexual orientation of persons.

Over 150 LGBT people from varying socioeconomic backgrounds from across the country were interviewed by the Ministry in partnership with J-FLAG.

#### **5. Jamaicans Protest the Murder of Dwayne Jones**

In July, the LGBT community and allies mobilized both locally and internationally to express their profound sadness and outrage about the murder of transgender teenager Dwayne Jones in the community of Irwin, St. James.

Parliamentarians and other leaders made encouraging statements showing solidarity with the position of J-FLAG and its allies and went even further by decrying the situation of especially vulnerable LGBT people in light of this unfortunate incident. Notably, Senator Mark Golding, Custos of Mandeville Sally Porteous, Professors Carolyn Cooper and Newton D. Duncan of the University of the West Indies, and journalists Emily Crooks and Dionne Jackson-Miller publicly condemned the killing and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

The incident also triggered new conversations in the Jamaican media about gender diversity and helped to initiate a refining of the media's lexicon with respect to gender non-conformity and for the first time expressions like 'transgender' replaced 'cross-dresser' in some major outlets.

Encouragingly, the police contacted J-FLAG to provide information about the murder and investigations. However, despite collecting several statements from alleged witnesses, an arrest has not yet been made.

#### **6. J-FLAG Executive Director Takes A Bold Approach to Leadership**

Dane Lewis, (who only started using his real name in July 2010 despite much anxiety from family, friends and staff) came out publicly in 2013 as J-FLAG's Executive Director. Dane joined J-FLAG in February 2008 as the Programme Manager and was known as Jason McFarlane until the organisation restructured in July 2010. After retiring the pseudonym, Dane showed his face for the first time in J-FLAG's "We Are Jamaicans" Campaign and went on to appear on local television without obscuring his face starting in May 2013.

The last known public face for the organisation was Brian Williamson who died in 2004.

#### **7. J-FLAG partners with Government to train Public Health Workers**

Discrimination perpetrated by healthcare providers help to hinder the access of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) to HIV prevention, treatment and care services.

Between September and November, J-FLAG in partnership with the National HIV Programme (of the National Family Planning Board (NFBP)) used a ten-module training manual to build the capacity of sixty public health workers to provide HIV services to gay, bisexual and other MSM.



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A survey conducted among participants found that 65% of them had never been trained about MSM-related health issues and 93% had never been trained to offer counseling about anal sex. A third of the participants (37%) said the training inspired them to change their thinking about LGBT people and 63% felt that they were already tolerant; some at the stage of acceptance while others are working on celebrating and promoting LGBT individuals. Overall, the vast majority of participants felt the workshop was useful to enhance their work and that they were now more exposed to the unique issues faced by LGBT people and would make an effort to use the information they learned.

## **8. Public Education & Awareness Raising**

LGBT activists and allies continued to create and make use of opportunities for Jamaicans to learn about human rights, gender and sexuality issues. There were a number of public education and awareness raising initiatives in 2013 such as four “equality protests” organised by AIDS-Free World (AFW) and organised by Quality of Citizenship Jamaica respectively, a walk for tolerance convened by National Anti-Discrimination Association (NADA), two symposia on homelessness and citizenship hosted by J-FLAG, the relaunch of the LGBT Speakers Bureau, outreach at LGBT parties, and a number of sensitization sessions with key stakeholders such as the police, the association of guidance counselors, the media, and the LGBT community itself, most notably in rural communities in Clarendon, Manchester, Westmoreland, St. Ann, and Portland.

In addition, while there have been a number of problematic outputs, the media continued to give space for constructive discussion/debate about human rights generally and LGBT rights specifically. Both major newspapers reaffirmed their support for LGBT rights, including the need for changes to or repealing of the “buggery law”. Media practitioners also participated in sensitivity trainings organised by Panos Caribbean and J-FLAG.

## **9. New LGBT Organisations Established**

LGBT rights activism was enriched by the establishment of new organisations like Quality of Citizenship Jamaica (QCJ), which works toward improving the lives of lesbian, bisexual (LB), and other women who have sex with women (WSW) through research into health issues, matters on sexuality, sexual violence, and sexual and reproductive health issues; Jamaica Association of Gays and Lesbians Abroad (JAGLA), which works toward raising awareness about the realities of LGBT Jamaicans and lobbies the international community to promote respect for human rights in Jamaica; and Dwayne’s House, an organisation working to build support for a shelter for homeless LGBT youth.

## **10. Improved Relationship with the Police**

J-FLAG continued to benefit from an improved working relationship with the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), including and especially with the Office of the Police Commissioner, Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences & Child Abuse (CISOCA), and officers at the Half Way Tree Police Station and the New Kingston Police Post.

LGBT people have also developed and increased degree of trust for the police and in every division at least one ally can be identified that is willing and able to deal with matters concerning sexual and gender minorities. As a result, there has been a 17% increase (up to November) of incidents of LGBT victimization reported to the police, which have been documented by J-FLAG.

Notably, we have seen where the police have served and protected LGBT people from baying mobs at times, even placing themselves in harm’s way to ensure the safety of these citizens, despite the direct conflict with prevailing cultural sentiments.

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