

EQU  L GROUND

20
22

ANNUAL
REPORT

*"Equality for all Sexual Orientations and
Gender Identities: Human Rights for Everyone"*

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Letter from the Executive Director, Rosanna Flamer-Caldera

Dear Friends,

2022 has been a year of peaks and valleys for our organisation, as is the case for our entire country. Whereas COVID-19 restrictions were gradually phasing out, Sri Lanka was hit hard by the economic and political crisis, which compelled us to change our modus operandi. Yet 2022 was a year of transformation that enabled us to successfully face the challenges that the “new normal” brought upon us. The dedication, hard work, and creativity of the staff enabled EG to reach milestones, not only at an organisational level but also at a national and international level.

In March 2022 EG welcomed a landmark decision by a UN human rights body (CEDAW) which found that the criminalisation of consensual, same-sex relations between women in Sri Lanka is a human rights violation. The CEDAW committee recommended the GOSL to decriminalise same-sex sexual relations and provide the complainant and her organisation the space to operate without hindrance or harassment. This case was filed by me in 2018, and after a 4 year wait, we finally got this landmark decision, which is the first of its kind in the world and is a major win for Sri Lanka’s LGBTIQ community. EQUAL GROUND was also invited in September 2022 to discuss LGBTIQ inclusion with parliamentarians, following which EG assisted the Samagi Jana Balawegaya's (SJB) National Reforms Committee in drafting their Party Manifesto, to incorporate LGBTIQ rights. EQUAL GROUND proposed that a sensitisation program be conducted for SJB parliamentarians and members to assure that all persons in the party were on board and stood behind the party manifesto.

Apart from fighting for the rights of the LGBTIQ community at national and international levels, EG celebrated Colombo PRIDE on a larger scale in 2022, by partnering up with other LGBTIQ rights organisations, local businesses, media, and other advocacy organisations around the island. Aiming to be as inclusive as possible, this year’s PRIDE celebrations included a host of physical and virtual events, so that anyone from any corner of Sri Lanka was able to join, despite the challenges currently facing the community.

2022 was a challenging year for EG, but each challenge was faced with resilience, and we shall continue to march forward in the years to come as we strive for equal rights and acceptance for the LGBTIQ community in Sri Lanka.

“EQUAL GROUND strives to end discrimination against the LGBTIQ community while working tirelessly to decriminalise consenting same-sex relationships, sensitising the masses to accept and understand LGBTIQ persons and building allyship in Sri Lanka.”



Backdrop of our work

Patriarchal gender roles and responsibilities are rigidly followed in Sri Lanka. Much significance is placed on traditional roles and responsibilities of men and women, towards each other and society at large. The heteronormative and binary gender standards that the culture tends to uphold is the root of this problem. Homosexuality and transgenderism are viewed as shameful and abnormal phenomena and is often termed as a psychological disturbance, manifestation of sins from previous lives, and/or a disease.

Advertisements are often placed by 'practitioners' claiming to cure persons of homosexuality as well as the consequences of it, grossly exploiting young persons and their hardships. Families suspecting family members of being queer often force marriages and in extreme cases there is curative rape. Violence in all forms is perpetrated against LGBTIQ persons across the board, by family members and society at large. This behavior is further validated by the behavior of authorities towards LGBTIQ persons who are often blackmailed, ridiculed and in some instances raped. Shame and internalised homophobia remain and cause LGBTIQ persons to go deeper and deeper underground.

Thanks to its colonial legacy, Sri Lanka is one of 70 countries in the world that criminalises same-sex sexual relations among consenting adults. Sections 365 and 365A of Sri Lanka's Penal Code, states that "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" (in other words, any type of sex that is considered unnatural) and "acts of gross indecency" are criminal offences punishable by law, carrying a sentence of up to 10 years. While they do not specify that these offences pertain to same-sex sexual relations, they are most often used against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ) community. In addition, the Vagrancy Law and Section 399 of the Penal Code regarding "cheating by personation" (referring to impersonation) are also used against the LGBTIQ community in Sri Lanka, particularly against transgender individuals. Further, due to the existing penal code and lack of protectionary measures for LGBTIQ persons, they are afforded little to no recourse to justice. LGBTIQ persons often leave instances of violence unreported due to the fear of their sexuality being disclosed as well as the shame associated with it. On rare occasions they do report such instances; authorities have in the past abused confidential information to further victimise the individuals.

The challenges the community faces are numerous, including legal barriers, social stigmatisation and various other kinds of discrimination in all spheres of their lives. As a result, the LGBTIQ community in Sri Lanka faces all forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and violence inevitably resulting in mental health issues, low self-esteem and internalised homophobia/transphobia.



Journey of EQUAL GROUND

Despite all the evident discrimination and stigmatisation of the LGBTIQ community, there was really no advocacy being done around LGBTIQ rights in a way that included the full spectrum of the queer community in Sri Lanka. Considering this phenomenon, Rosanna Flamer-Caldera our Executive Director, formed EQUAL GROUND, brick by brick.

Founded in 2004, EG is the oldest, truly diverse non-profit organisation seeking economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning/Queer (LGBTIQ) community of Sri Lanka. EG grew from strength to strength due to its continuous hard-work, determination and resilience and the support it received from its donors, heterosexual allies and friends.

Timeline (highlights)





Vision:

“Equality for all sexual orientations and gender identities; human rights for everyone.”



Mission:

“Our mission is to make the lives of LGBTIQ persons in Sri Lanka meaningful and free from stigma and discrimination, to decriminalise consenting adult same sex sexual relationships and put in place policies of non-discrimination to protect and safeguard LGBTIQ lives in our country.”



Geographic reach:

18 districts out of 25, and more than 50 villages and towns across the island.



Scope of work:

National (training, awareness and sensitisation, counseling, community welfare, networking, advocacy initiatives)
International
(International reporting mechanisms, collaborations).



Beneficiaries:

(LGBTIQ and non-LGBTIQ).



Publications:

Booklets (11),
Awareness Tools and Guidelines (10),
Magazine (8),
Research (8).

<https://www.equal-ground.org/resources/>



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EQUAL GROUND and its operating environment amidst political and economic crisis

Sri Lanka witnessed a multidimensional crisis compounded by food insecurity, threatened livelihoods, shortages of vital and essential medicines, as well as rising protection concerns. The economic crisis is the worst since Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 and is having humanitarian consequences for many vulnerable people in the country. In July 2022, inflation in the country hit a record high of 54.6 percent while food inflation rose to 81 per cent. The economic crisis has led to political and social turmoil in Sri Lanka which has spiraled down into a humanitarian emergency. Due to these unprecedented challenges the work carried out by EG was affected. Fuel shortage, power cuts on a daily basis, low supplies of basic essentials such as medicine, and soaring inflation compelled EG to change its modus operandi, and most of its work was conducted online.

That said, through all these challenges EG has continued its efforts and stood firm against all adversity.

2022 at a glance

Community Welfare and Service	Awareness and Sensitisation	Policy and Advocacy Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counselling (online and telephone counseling) - Capacity building and social media skill development (1) - Emergency response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity and Inclusion workshops (3) - FFLGBTIQ (1) - Progress through Partnerships workshop (1) - Sensitisation workshop with non-LGBTIQ (1) - Social media campaigns (17) - International Day Observations (8) - Colombo PRIDE - Publications (2 booklets, 1 policy brief) 	<p>National level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration with other like-minded organisations - Meeting with parliamentarians (1) - Workshop with young policy makers and politicians (2) - Meeting with the IGP <p>Legal empowerment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fundamental Rights case - CEDAW case decision <p>International:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Universal Periodic Review (UPR), 2022 submission - Accolades and Networking

Activity rationale and details

Community welfare and service

EQUAL GROUND is committed to empowering and creating a safe space for all LGBTIQ individuals. Therefore, EG always attempts to provide opportunities for self-help including mental wellbeing, economic, social and political empowerment, access to health, education, housing and legal protection for the LGBTIQ community.

Counselling: EQUAL GROUND's counselling service for LGBTIQ persons was established in 2005 which is available via direct phone calls or online. The Counselling lines are in 3 languages (English, Sinhala and Tamil) and consists of a women only line for LBO women and a Trans only line for Transgender persons. The Counselling lines are operated by EG's staff who have been trained in counselling. In 2022, altogether EG received **73** phone calls through its counseling line number where necessary service including legal advice, counselling or relevant information was provided.

Currently, the FB counselling page has nearly **1041** followers. The page reach is **1744** (Jan 2022-Dec 2022).

Social and Digital Media Training: With the aim to develop grassroots level activist's knowledge on digital and social media as a tool for advocacy, awareness raising, and policy influencing in the online space for the betterment of the LGBTIQ community, EG organised this training in May, 2022. All participants (14) have created their own LGBTIQ activism pages on Facebook and 12 of them are actively engaged as activists within EG virtual activism network.

Emergency Response: During June to September this year Ukrainian refugees/tourists reached out to EG as they ran out of their prescribed HIV medicines for daily usage. Ironically, they were unable to go back to Ukraine due to their country's situation at that time. None of these drugs were available even in the pharmacies for them to purchase. EQUAL GROUND guided and referred them to the Galle, Balapitiya and the Colombo HIV/STD government clinics where they finally managed to get the medicines and due care.

Awareness and sensitisation

EQUAL GROUND believes that sensitisation and awareness programs play a crucial role in curbing the perceived stigma and discrimination of the LGBTIQ community. Including the excluded is a challenging task and to achieve it, apart from enhancing the capacity of the community, EG extended its work with corporates, family and friends of LGBTIQ (FFLGBTIQ), non-LGBTIQ people in general, media, allies, like-minded organisations and so on. Moreover, EG also initiated innovative and impactful social media campaigns and publications as tools for awareness raising and sensitisation.

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the workplace: D&I sensitising programs are an integral part of EG's work as they make workplaces safe for LGBTIQ employees, thereby improving their ability to stay employed and become economically independent. Also, promoting diversity and inclusion and having LGBTIQ-friendly workplaces can help businesses avoid costs associated with high labour turnover. In 2022, EG conducted 3 D&I workshops with **Sysco Labs** and **Uber** and participated in a panel discussion in collaboration with the **British High Commission** which saw numerous corporate audience members including the CEOs of many permanent international and local companies. Significantly, through these D&I sessions EG reached approximately **200** people from various corporates and organisations.

FFLGBTIQ: FFLGBTIQ was formed in December 2017 and is instrumental in assisting parents, families, and friends of LGBTIQ persons to join the efforts to accept, respect, and cherish their LGBTIQ family members and friends. This forum helps educate, guide, provide resources and support family & friends of LGBTIQ persons to come 'out' in support of their LGBTIQ Family members and friends, thus creating a further support mechanism as well as offering security, shelter and acceptance. In September 2022 EG was able to conduct one such FFLGBTIQ program with 25 participants, where misconceptions such as being LGBTIQ is a mental illness, or an addiction were identified among the participants and rectified effectively. Of note here is that our 2010 publication *Stepping Out - for parents of children with alternate sexual orientations and gender identities* - is still distributed widely as an educational tool.

Progress Through Partnership (PTP): The objective of The Progress through Partnership (PTP) initiative is to create a space where ideas and strategies can be nurtured and allowed to flourish, a space where the numerous organisations and individual activists working on LGBTIQ issues in Sri Lanka can link their networks, coordinate, share best practices and experiences, and create a synergy to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The PTP initiative is open to LGBTIQ organisations and LGBTIQ individuals working in the fields of LGBTIQ rights, sexual and reproductive rights, education, art, and theatre. In September 2022, EG conducted one PTP workshop with

26 participants. This workshop helped the participants to gain insight on the different issues the LGBTIQ community is facing throughout Sri Lanka and led to a better understanding on how to address these issues utilising an inclusive approach.

Sensitisation workshop with non-LGBTIQ: The aim of conducting sensitisation workshops is to address the overarching issue of LGBTIQ rights in Sri Lanka by providing accurate knowledge and building awareness amongst the general public, Local Government Authorities (LGA), and other relevant bodies about sexual and gender diversity and the LGBTIQ community. EQUAL GROUND's various consultations with LGBTIQ activists and allies have identified a specific issue that transgender people face when they attempt to amend their legal documents via the government-approved Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). They face difficulties because the LGA are either not aware of the governmental circular on the subject and/or do not understand the process. Thus, EG conducted workshops with the representatives of LGA, CBOs and general public on GRC, discriminatory laws and policies of the country against LGBTIQ people, basic human rights etc. In March 2022 one such workshop was conducted with **25** non-LGBTIQ persons.

Social media campaigns: EQUAL GROUND believes that social media is a great tool for creating awareness and sensitising people on LGBTIQ issues, as it provides a chance to highlight the existing issues to a larger audience. In 2022, EG conducted **17** social media campaigns and received an overwhelmingly positive response. The major social media campaigns of 2022 were: **Live with Love, Missing Piece of the Puzzle: Educational and Workplace Gaps regarding LGBTIQ rights, Is My Workplace Safe?** and **LGBTIQ Terminology**.

Live with Love: From June 2022, EG initiated its latest social awareness campaign 'Live with Love', to create more acceptance and support of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions and LGBTIQ identities among Sri Lankan society thereby reducing the discrimination and marginalisation faced by the LGBTIQ community. **The reach of this campaign was over 25,000** in less than a year both on Facebook and Instagram. Part of this campaign included 5 short story telling videos. EQUAL GROUND's short film '**The Struggle**' was selected to be screened for the **30th Mardi Gras Film Festival, Sydney, Australia 2023**.

LGBTIQ Terminology: This was the first time that Sri Lankan audiences were exposed to the nuances of the usage of diverse terminologies regarding LGBTIQ community. **The campaign reached over 3000 users on Facebook.**

Missing Piece of the Puzzle; Educational and Workplace Gaps regarding LGBTIQ rights: To address the policy gaps in the education and workplace sectors, EG first developed a policy brief which informed this campaign. The campaign consisted of animated videos and posts. **It reached over 5000 Facebook users.** Apart from the reach and the engagements, the campaign also received overwhelmingly positive feedback on social media.

Is My Workplace Safe? To highlight the legal challenges for LGBTIQ employees in workplaces and also guide them to get proper legal redress in case of workplace rights violation, EG developed a booklet of information on the topic. The findings were shared online and **reached over 3000 social media users.**

Colombo PRIDE 2022: EQUAL GROUND is the only organisation in Sri Lanka to hold annual PRIDE celebrations for the past 18 years - an important event in the Sri Lankan LGBTIQ calendar. Considering the current economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka, this year's PRIDE celebrations centered around the overarching theme of 'Resilient and Unsilenced.' It also depicted the determination of our community to fight for what we want and what we are, as well as paying homage to the history of Pride celebrations - born out of protest for equality and rights. The colours of the logo represented all of us in the LGBTIQ community as well as our allies.

Aiming to be as inclusive as possible, this year's PRIDE celebrations included a host of physical and virtual events, so that anyone from any corner of Sri Lanka was able to join, despite the challenges currently facing the community.

The events of the Colombo PRIDE 2022 included **The Abhimani Queer Film Festival, The Rainbow Music and Dance Festival, The Rainbow Bus Ride, The Rainbow Kite Festival, The Original Song Composition Competition (virtual), The Cartoon/Comic Strip Competition (virtual) and Short Film Competition (virtual).**

The Abhimani Queer Film Festival: In 2022, the Abhimani Queer Film Festival 2022 – South Asia's first and oldest Queer Film Festival – was launched with a screening of *Funny Boy*, based on Shyam Selvadurai's best-selling novel of the same name, published in 1994. Deepa Mehta, award-winning director of the film attended the event along with the Canadian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka and many other dignitaries.

Later, to kick start The Colombo PRIDE 2022 celebrations, a three-day Abhimani Queer Film festival was inaugurated by the Deputy High Commissioner of the Australian High Commission, Ms. Amanda Jewell, on 19th June 2022. A carefully-curated selection of international and local, short and feature length queer films were shown at the festival – including critically acclaimed films such as *Boy Erased*, *Firebird*, and *Badhaai Do*.

The three-day Festival was attended by a total of **63 persons**. Attendance was severely hampered by the transportation issues experienced due to the fuel shortage in Sri Lanka at the time.

The Rainbow Music and Dance Festival: The Rainbow Music and Dance Festival was organised again in collaboration with the National Transgender Network of Sri Lanka. The aim of this event was to give an opportunity for LGBTIQ persons in Sri Lanka to showcase their diverse talents in singing, dancing, acting, playing instruments, and performing.

24 performers and 10 volunteers took part in the Festival which was attended by **91** audience members.

The Rainbow Bus Parade and Rainbow Kite Festival: Colombo PRIDE celebrations are typically kicked off with the Rainbow Bus Parade – in place of a Pride March in Colombo. However, this year, due to the fuel crisis, the Bus Ride had to be revamped. As such, the Bus Parade was used to transport attendees of the Rainbow Kite Festival from Colombo city to Mount Lavinia and back, free of charge. It acted too, as a bus parade consisting of 2 gayly decorated buses, including a "Papare" band. The celebrations wrapped up with the Kite Festival, where LGBTIQ persons and allies were able to mingle and enjoy an evening of music, dancing, and relaxing on the beach. **The Kite Festival was attended by over 200 persons.** We were proud to have a film crew shooting at the Kite Festival for National Geographic's "Pride from above" series.

Cartoon/Comic Strip Competition (virtual): This year, considering the current political climate and the ongoing protests in Sri Lanka, EQUAL GROUND wanted to highlight the LGBTQ community's contribution to the people's struggle/movement (aragalaya). Protesting and advocating for rights and equality is nothing new for the LGBTQ community. In fact, PRIDE celebrations were born out of a gay liberation movement known as the Stonewall Uprisings in 1969. As such, this competition called on artists and cartoonists to submit their entries on the theme 'Resilient and Unsilenced', focusing on the LGBTQ community's involvement with protests, both current and past, and their place in political movements. EG received more than 15 entries.

Original Song Competition (virtual): EQUAL GROUND called on musicians from all corners of the island to send us original songs composed by them, highlighting the joy, pride, and struggles of being part of the LGBTQ community in Sri Lanka, especially during the current time, under the overall theme, 'Resilient and Unsilenced.' The entries had to include original lyrics and music composed AND a video/recording of the song being performed (MP3/MP4 format). This is the first time a competition of this nature has been held by EG. While we only received 4 entries, the quality of all 4 was excellent.

Short Film Competition (virtual): EQUAL GROUND called on filmmakers from all around Sri Lanka to submit entries that brought to light stories from the LGBTQ community in the current crisis. EQUAL GROUND received more than 15 entries in total.

Social Media Reach of Colombo PRIDE 2022: Through the Colombo PRIDE Facebook page, **EG reached 77,668 users as of July 2022.** The posts promoting the events and the virtual competitions also reached a much wider audience through social media promotions and engagements of our partners and allies.

Feedbacks received:

"Ever since I came out, I have never experienced an event like this. Thank you so much for organising something like this. I felt so seen." - An attendee at the Abhimani Queer Film Festival, 2022.

"EQUAL GROUND made an awesome day for me. Yesterday I was in heaven because of you guys. When we felt alone, at that time we need support. I got it yesterday" - Twitter user on the CP2022 Rainbow Kite Festival.

"Thank you to EQUAL GROUND for inviting me to perform as Kandie King at this amazing event." - Kandice Seymour-King, a performer at the Rainbow Music and Dance Festival, via Facebook

"Thanks once again for that amazing session - We had around 80+ attendees who joined in and gave some really great feedback. Also, amazing work with the Colombo Pride events - We were happy to be a part of it. It's been a pleasure and we'll be in touch." - Pawani Perera, Senior Associate - Executive Operations, Sysco LABS Sri Lanka (CP2022 Partner Organisation)

International Day Observations/Commemorations: Like previous years, this year too EG commemorated various international important days related to LGBTIQ community, which included: International Women's Day, IDAHOBIT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia), Lesbian Visibility Day, 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, Bisexual Visibility Day, Mental Health Awareness Week, Transgender Remembrance Day, Intersex Awareness Day, Breast Cancer Awareness, Pronouns Day etc. EQUAL GROUND developed online contents to create awareness about the importance of these days. **The total social media reach for all these campaigns were over 20,000.**

Publications (trilingual): An integral part of EG's work is designing and publishing educational materials and research. In 2022, EG developed one booklet titled 'Is My Workplace Safe? Labour Laws and LGBTIQ Community' and ran a social media campaign using the content of the booklet. EG also developed a policy brief highlighting the policy gaps in the education sector and workplaces regarding LGBTIQ inclusive rights. A booklet was also developed to sensitise and educate the heterosexual community on the use of correct terminology to describe individuals from the LGBTIQ community.

EQUAL GROUND's well researched and evidence-based publications have not only sensitised and educated people in this country as well as abroad but has also been instrumental in guiding them in the right direction. One such example is a Sri Lankan lesbian woman who reached out to EG in 2022 and asked for its publications on LGBT rights in Sri Lanka, which she needed for her case to seek refugee status based on her sexual orientation, in New Zealand. EQUAL GROUND assisted her accordingly, and later, she thanked EG:

"I'm pleased to let you know that I have won my immigration case. I'm now a recognised refugee in New Zealand (NZ), I believe that I'm the first Sri Lankan woman in NZ to get refugee status based on my sexual orientation. I'm very thankful to you for the support you have given me."

Policy and advocacy initiatives

EQUAL GROUND's policy and advocacy work is both national and global. EG continues to work nationally with grassroots level/local organisations, LGBTIQ community members, government representatives, healthcare workers, law enforcement, media, the business community and so on. EQUAL GROUND also consistently works with the UN on treaty body reporting mechanisms, and informs internationally renowned forums and platforms.

(National Level)

Collaborations with media, allies and like-minded organisations: EQUAL GROUND always welcomes collaborations with supportive allies, with the help of which it can reach more people and can create impactful events. In 2022, EG partnered with **8** local businesses, corporates, media, and other advocacy organisations to celebrate PRIDE on a larger scale.

Proud Partners of EG for PRIDE celebrations 2022: Pulse – digital and social media, Lite FM and TNL Now – media (radio and social media), Selyn – local business partner, Uber – corporate partner, Sugar Beach – location partner for the Rainbow Kite Festival, Sysco Labs – corporate partner, John Keells Holdings – corporate partner, National Transgender Network (NTN) – Collaborative partner for the Rainbow Music and Dance Festival.

Discussions on LGBTQ rights, decriminalisation, and inclusivity with parliamentarians: EQUAL GROUND was invited on September 2022 by MP Buddhika Pathirana (SJB) to put together a discussion on LGBTIQ inclusion, following which a proposal was made and accepted to (a) the Samagi Jana Balawegaya's (SJB) National Reforms Committee incorporate LGBTIQ rights in their Party Manifesto, (b) sensitize SJB parliamentarians and politicians on SOGIE issues. This discussion was attended by LGBTIQ activists, lawyers, healthcare professionals, business personnel as well as politicians from the SJB party including the party leader Mr. Sajith Premadasa, who is also the current leader of the Opposition.

Workshop with young policy makers and politicians: EQUAL GROUND conducted two in person workshops with politicians and policy makers in January and March of 2022. Thirty-four (34) persons attended these workshops where we discussed the challenges of LGBTIQ community, through which we attempted to gauge their opinion and mindset. The majority of participants (over 90%) believed that all citizens in a country should have equal rights and believed that rights of all humans should be protected.

Dropping of Section 365 and 365A from the Emergency Regulations: In August 2022 the President added Section 365 and 365A to the Emergency Regulations which means law enforcement officers can arrest anyone from the LGBTIQ community if they suspect any kind of threat from them. EQUAL GROUND was the first to voice against this on social media, which other like-minded organizations echoed. This finally led to these two sections being deleted from the Emergency Regulations.

Update on Fundamental Rights case: In September 2021, EG, led by Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, Executive Director, 2 trustees of EG, and 7 others filed a petition in the Court of Appeal seeking a mandate in the nature of a Writ of Prohibition against the conducting of a training programme for the police where malicious, erroneous and discriminatory remarks were made about the LGBTIQ community. Subsequently, on 08 December 2021, after the writ petition was supported, the two-judge bench comprising Justices Sobhitha Rajakaruna and Dhammika Ganepola declared that there is a cause of action for the case to be taken to the merit stage and ordered Court to issue notice to the respondents in the petition. The Court of Appeal granted leave to proceed with EG's petition and ordered notice be issued to all parties.

Finally, in 2022, the Police are now in the process of drafting a circular which is to be circulated island wide prohibiting homophobic and derogatory statements and homophobic harassment against the LGBTIQ community.

In December 2022, Inspector General of Police (IGP) C.D Wickramaratne, in a historic meeting between senior police officers and members of the LGBTIQ community, tendered an apology to the LGBTIQ community for historic violations and promised to address their key grievances.

The meeting, initiated by the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment and the Sri Lanka Police, brought together several LGBTIQ organisations, including EQUAL GROUND, National Transgender Network, Venasa Transgender Network, Young Out Here and legal pro bono organisation, iProbono. Senior officers of the Sri Lanka Police who were present included the IGP, DIGs for Women, Legal and Media, amongst several others.

(International level)

At the United Nations (UN) level, EG has consistently submitted shadow reports to the UPR, CEDAW, ICCPR, CRC, ICESCR since 2008.

UN Treaty Body Reporting Mechanism:

EQUAL GROUND submitted the 2022's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report in collaboration with the Center for International Human Rights (CIHR) of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law for the upcoming session (2022).

Even though the State has failed to implement the relevant recommendations made in the previous sessions with regards to the violations based on SOGIE, EG strongly believes the UPR submissions have provided the opportunity to hold the government of Sri Lanka accountable internationally.

CEDAW decision: This complaint, submitted in August 2018, challenged the criminalisation of lesbians and bisexual women in Sri Lanka. It was submitted by Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, Executive Director of EQUAL GROUND. She argued that the Sri Lankan Penal Code, which was amended in 1995 to criminalise same-sex sexual conduct between women, violates her human rights as protected by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Sri Lanka has ratified both the Convention and the Optional Protocol, the latter of which allows individual complaints to be considered by the CEDAW Committee. This ground-breaking case was the first time the Committee considered an individual complaint relating specifically to the criminalisation of lesbian and bisexual women.

The CEDAW committee urged the government to decriminalise same-sex sexual relations. It also asked Sri Lanka to take measures to protect women against gender-based violence by adopting comprehensive legislation against discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, and provide adequate protection, support systems and remedies, including reparation, to lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women who are victims of discrimination. This sends a strong message to Sri Lanka's policymakers, as well as the international community, that ensuring the rights and equal treatment of all citizens— including LGBTIQ persons – and removing archaic, discriminatory laws, is foremost.

Accolades and Networking:

Networking, attending sessions and workshops in diverse international forums are an important part of international advocacy, which our Executive Director has maintained throughout, and this has assisted EG to gain international recognition. This year also, Rosanna Flamer-Caldera not only continued her international activism, but was also bestowed with the prestigious Community HERO Award.

ILGA World Conference

Our Executive Director, Rosanna Flamer- Caldera was invited to be a speaker at the ILGA World Conference from 2 to 6 May 2022 - presenting the CEDAW case.

Asian Development Bank Conference

She was also invited by the Asian Development Bank for a conference to launch the GESI Framework in Paro, Bhutan from October 4-6, 2022.

OutRight Action International's Advocacy Week

Rosanna was also invited to be a Delegate for OutRight Action International's Advocacy Week and a speaker at the OutRight Action International's summit from December 5 - 12, 2022 in New York City.

HERO Award

She received the Community Hero's award on 25th November 2022 in Bangkok for her work in Sri Lanka advocating for the rights of the LGBTIQ community.

She was invited again to be a guest lecturer for the Postgraduate Diploma in Gender and Health Year 2022/23 facilitated by the Faculty of Medicine University of Colombo Sri Lanka.

Significant achievements of 2022

01

Social media reach is nearly 300,000.

06

8 organisations, corporates and media houses joined EGs coalition for Colombo PRIDE 2022.

02

5000 booklets and awareness materials were disseminated among people and various organisations.

07

Legal and policy change discussions with parliamentarians.

03

Over 100 persons accessed the counselling service.

08

CEDAW decision where the committee urged the Sri Lankan government to decriminalise same-sex sexual relations.

04

150 representatives from 2 prominent businesses received D&I sensitising (Sysco Labs and Uber).

09

Inspector General of Police (IGP) C.D Wickramaratne tendered an apology to the LGBTIQ community for historic violations and promised to address their key grievances.

05

25 FFLGBTIQ were sensitised.

10

EQUAL GROUND's short film 'The Struggle' was selected to be screened for the 30th Mardi Gras Film Festival, Sydney, Australia 2023.

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"Equality for all Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities:
Human Rights for everyone"

