

**British Chargé d’Affaires in Bangkok, Margaret Tongue’s, speaking points for LGBTI in Asia panel event at the British Residence Bangkok arranged by APCOM on 27 November 2016**

- Good afternoon.
- Proud to be hosting this event with Stonewall UK and APCOM; to set the scene for the issues that will be discussed during the ILGA World Conference.
- Really pleased to have such a great panel, with speakers here from Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia and of course Thailand. There are some very positive things about the situation for LGBT communities in Asia but many – too many – challenges remain. Midnight I think is going to talk about this so I won’t say more now, but I am very much looking forward to hearing from our expert panellists about some of the hidden issues and remaining challenges, as well as some discussion about how we can work together to end discrimination.
- I would like to say, on behalf of the Embassy and the Foreign Office, that we are particularly pleased to host this event for two reasons.
- Firstly, a major focus of the Foreign Office’s work on this issue is building international consensus on LGBT rights. For example, the UK is a founder member of the new Equal Rights Coalition launched at the Global Conference on LGBTI Human Rights in Montevideo this July.
- We want to build international consensus, both in order to encourage change all around the world; and to challenge the view that promoting LGBT rights is somehow a “Western” agenda. In our approach to supporting LGBT rights we always seek advice from, and work in partnership with, local LGBT civil society groups.
- Which brings me on to the second reason. The British government deeply values the closeness of its relationship with civil society in this area of policy, as in many others.
- A vibrant civil society can be a multiplier for all human rights, it can drive sustainable economic development and reinforce good governance; and be a force for stability and the rule of law. Economies and societies will thrive when people are able to freely contribute ideas and hold their governments to account.
- We believe that increased inclusivity leads to better decision making. Open societies facilitate debate. Civil society should be celebrated, not silenced.
- This event today continues our approach of providing for civil society a safe space to talk, to network, to share ideas. It continues to be part of the Embassy’s offer to you.
- Finally I would like to say a couple of words about the “16 days of activism on gender-based violence”, which began on Friday.
- Ending violence against women and girls is a top priority for the UK govt, as part of our work to increase equality and non-discrimination for all members of society, in the same

way as our focus on advocating for, and supporting, LGBT rights. Tackling violence against LBT women is an important element of this; and the root causes of gender-based violence – social norms and attitudes that condone violence, normalise power imbalances, and create discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, also contribute to homophobia.

- In his first speech since being appointed the first UN Independent Expert on the protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Ajaan Vitit Muntarbhorn spoke passionately about the “vortex of violence and discrimination” often faced by LGBT communities, and tackling this will be a vitally important part of his work.
- The UK was involved in lobbying to defend his mandate ahead of the vote at the UN General Assembly; we actively supported his mandate and encouraged others to do the same. The vote just a few days ago sends a clear message that the international community must uphold the universality of human rights, and the UK offers its full support to Ajaan Vitit in his important work.
- Our next speaker is going to be Alysha Khambay, from Stonewall UK, followed by Midnight and then our panel.
- I’m delighted that you’ll be joining us straight after this event for a reception to mark both the 28<sup>th</sup> ILGA World Conference and APCOM’s 10th anniversary.