



Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals & Gays
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Dear Friends and Supporters:

We thank our international allies for their continued interest in the state of LGBT affairs in Jamaica. Your support over the years has strengthened our voice and made it possible for us to make progress where we hardly thought it possible. One of the most significant ventures in which our international allies have collaborated with us was the SMM campaign that started in 2004, and which culminated in a local debate about the appropriateness of violence and hate in Jamaican music played in public places. Despite the occasionally homophobic rant by rogue deejays, we have seen a general decline in the level of homophobia coming from new Jamaican artistes and in new music from Jamaica. We have also seen corporate sponsors withdrawing their support from music that promotes violence or discrimination against any group.

It with this in mind that we find it unfortunate that a campaign has been launched calling for the boycott of two Jamaican products, one marketed by a company that unequivocally distanced itself from the hostility and violence typical of Jamaican music towards members of the LGBT community. In April 2008, Red Stripe took the brave and principled stance to cease sponsorship of music festivals that promoted hate and intolerance, including that against members of the LGBT community. The naming of Red Stripe, therefore, as a target of this boycott is extremely damaging to the cause of LGBT activists in Jamaica.

In the global arena in which we operate today, events in one place can and do have repercussions in another. Concomitantly, information about occurrences in different places across the globe is easily accessible everywhere. We believe that any overseas entity or organisation seeking to agitate for change in a context with which it has only passing familiarity should first do its homework to ensure that it does not do harm to its credibility and ultimately to the cause of the local community whose interest it seeks to defend.

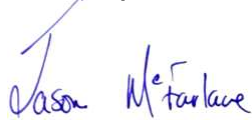
It is unfortunate that the organisers of the current campaign to boycott Jamaica have failed in the key area of fact finding. The misguided targeting of Red Stripe does tremendous damage to a process of change that we began almost 11 years ago. The boycott call has now left us not only with our persistent day to day challenges but with a need to engage Red Stripe and attempt damage control as a result of actions that we did not take. Against this background, we would like to reiterate that while we appreciate the support given by our international allies, and understand their impatience for change, we

who live in Jamaica best know and understand the dynamics of our situation. We also know that change is a slow and tedious process and those engage in it must be patient.

Jamaica's deeply ingrained antipathy towards homosexuality and homosexuals is a social phenomenon that will not be undone by boycott campaigns or government dictate. It requires the painstaking effort of confronting the society and talking to social actors who can bring change in the way society sees LGBT people. We have been doing this through a small but growing group of increasingly aware opinion leaders who are concerned about the damage homophobia does to our society. We need those ears to continue being open to us and we need the relative safety that some of us have been given to speak to them.

It is important that our international allies understand the nature of our struggle and engage us in a respectful way about it. Unless they are willing and able to lead the struggle in the trenches as we have done, it is important that they be guided by us. To do otherwise would be to act in a manner that destroys the space for dialogue that we have managed to create over the past decade and to set back our struggle. It is for this reason that we urge those in the international arena who seek to act in our name and on our behalf to do so not only with the utmost care and responsibility but also with due consideration for our efforts and concerns as members of the local activist community.

Sincerely,



Jason McFarlane
Programmes Manager