Remarks by Caleb Orozco  
Core Group Path2Equality Event  
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Your Excellencies, it is an honor to be here among you today and share with you my story.

My story starts, as many of ours do, with family.

When my mother looks at me, all she sees is her son - a stubborn child who eats in a rush and tries to address all of her needs. To my sister, I am ‘Papa’, the one she barks at for not feeding the dog and forgetting to put oil in the car. To my family, I am simply Caleb – a son, annoying brother, and responsive caretaker.

To many others in Belize, however, I am someone else: a “battiman,” a gay vigilante trying to upturn my country’s traditions and values. My name, “Orozco,” has even become slang that society uses to ridicule LGBT people. The people on the streets who have harassed, intimidated and taunted me for being gay don’t see a son, brother, or caretaker – they don’t even see a human being deserving of protection or equality.

Yet, with my family’s unconditional support, I found the strength to challenge the public, to challenge the State, and to challenge the criminalization of my personhood under Section 53 of the Criminal Code.

Ten years ago, I set out on the path to achieve equality in my country - to bring down Belize’s sodomy law --- and this year, I WON!

I am happy to report that just recently, on August 10th, the Supreme Court of Belize ruled that Section 53 of the Criminal Code was unconstitutional. The decision cited international human rights norms and jurisprudence – including the seminal case of Toonen v. Australia from the UN Human Rights Committee --- and our constitution on the grounds that every human being has inalienable rights to dignity, privacy, freedom of expression, equality and non-discrimination. The Chief Justice wrote, “The court cannot act on prevailing majority views or what is popularly accepted as moral…The duty of the court is to apply the provisions of the constitution.”

The news of this victory has reverberated throughout the Caribbean and been a beacon of hope for many.

Yet, to be clear, since the Supreme Court ruling, I have received repeated threats on my life. Not only is my life in jeopardy, so is the Supreme Court decision! The Prime Minister’s government is appealing parts of the ruling. The National Evangelical Association of Belize is trying to appeal the decision in its totality. And, the government is in the process of creating a new mechanism dubiously called the “Church-State
Morality Commission.” Should the Morality Commission come into realization, it will not only be the rights of the LGBT community that are under attack – it will be the rights of ALL Belizians that the Commission deems as immoral.

We can fight this. I will do my part, and I thank all of you who have helped me already. For those of you I’m just meeting today, I’m asking for your help. I’m asking every government and UN representative here in this room right now: if you have a relationship with the Government of Belize --- whether through trade, development, or technical assistance --- please use your access and voice to support our struggle.

This situation must recognize the bigger picture. What happens in Belize can help strengthen standards throughout the Caribbean for the protection of LGBT citizens in every island and country. Belize is not the only Caribbean country that is changing its views toward LGBT people. The best thing I see across the Caribbean today is that we are building an LGBT movement. We are not waiting; we’re leading and insisting on a better quality of life for ourselves.

Change is coming to my country as community resistance to oppression and violence is inspired by hope. Systems of support matter for us like this event here today to pave the path to greater equality in Belize and around the world. Today, my family is my greatest defender, but one day soon, I know it will be my government.