

The Rt Hon Baroness Scotland
Secretary General
The Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
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31 July 2018

Your Excellency

In recent days, there has been much attention on Zimbabwe's application to rejoin the Commonwealth and this is currently under consideration.

I hope you will agree that readmission should be conditional on the new government pledging and conforming to the democratic and human rights principles of the Commonwealth Charter.

36 member states of the Commonwealth, including Zimbabwe, currently outlaw homosexuality. They criminalise around one fifth of the world's LGBT+ population.

Readmitting Zimbabwe to the Commonwealth while it continues to penalise LGBT+ citizens would send the wrong signal: that homophobic persecution is legitimate and acceptable.

Out of the 71 countries that still criminalise same-sex relations, more than half are in the Commonwealth using laws often imposed by Britain during the colonial era.

A requirement for reform, as a condition of Commonwealth membership, would send a strong message to those member states that persecute, imprison and even have the death penalty for LGBT+ people.

During Mugabe's notoriously intolerant rule, Zimbabwean LGBTs faced extortion, arrest and even physical torture. Sadly, amending such laws doesn't seem like a priority for any of the current party leaders.

The Commonwealth should go further than insisting on LGBT+ human rights. It should also demand that Zimbabwe ensures genuinely free and fair elections, and an end to State censorship and restrictions on free speech and the right to protest.

The Commonwealth is a club and clubs impose rules on new or re-joining members.

The Commonwealth is on record as saying Zimbabwe rejoining would be a 'momentous occasion.' Indeed, it would. But it has to be on the basis of the country's full alignment with the Commonwealth's democratic and human rights principles.

I hope you will agree and give assurances to this effect.

Yours sincerely

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