



We Say NO! to Kopano Partnering with Unjust City!

Statement by Triangle Project and Free Gender

23 May 2022

The Kopano convening is an annual gathering led by the Other Foundation with support from its grantee and sector partners. The convening is a collaborative strategy development platform that brings together LGBTQI+ activists and allies to deepen our understanding of the socio-economic and political context in which we seek to bring about equity for LGBTQI+ people. In its public call for participation, the Kopano convening committee recognises that building alliances for solidarity within our own movements is key to shifting the balance of power wherever we find ourselves in the region. The take-away from the Kopano brief is that for us to break the social and political isolation of our struggles – whether in Cape Town or Kampala – we must have each other’s back. But these commitments on paper are contradicted by the Kopano convening committee’s choice to partner with the City of Cape Town to host a welcoming reception on the 2nd day of the programme.

If the Kopano convening committee had our backs, they would have reached out to learn and taken guidance from us on how the City of Cape Town continues to fail and blatantly disregard the experiences of black LGBTQI+ people in the metro. Instead, they invited us to a meeting two months before the convening, shared their programme and categorically stated that the purpose of the meeting was simply to brief us about the intended programme. The local organisations in attendance attempted to push back against some of the programmatic choices and although we committed to support Kopano, we left feeling compromised, and they undermined years of local organising, such as through their choice to host Kopano at UCT. This is a space far removed from the centres of queer organising in Cape Town and a space that represents the city’s issues around access and exclusion for black marginalised people especially. Instead, we were told that the Kopano convening is a regional event and that foregrounding the socio-political context of South Africa, and the Cape metro, would be insincere, and even marginalise the rest of the continent. Surely, this is not acceptable? Our very politics is grounded in solidarity, in questioning space and place, in questioning the oppressive status quo of who is allowed to claim and belong, and who not. How we resist the deliberate erasure or diminishment of our presence, our right to belong, is deeply political.

We believe that the Kopano convening team will not go into any other African country or city on the continent, that mirrors the same contested politics of space and exclusion (of poor, black queer people especially) and not walk “carefully”, with deliberate

consideration of the socio-political context of LGBTQI+ people who occupy the space daily and are left to deal with the pain of an unjust city, long after Kopano convenings are concluded and all the festivities have ended. We do not deny that the state-sanctioned homo-, trans and intersexphobia, with the never-ending persecution of LGBTQI+ people across the continent comes with a heavy political weight and diverge from the South African context in important ways.

However, in case we must remind them, Cape Town is still Africa. If anything, the South African 'queer liberation story' teaches us that rights do not and never directly translate into the absence of structural and other intersecting forms of violence. LGBTQI+ people die in this city. The Cape Metro is a hotspot for hate crimes against LGBTQI+ people in the country. Contrary to what its slogan says, the City of Cape Town has never worked for us, not for LGBTQI+ people, not for women and children, not for the working poor, not for sex workers, not for people who use drugs, not for undocumented refugees from other African countries.

The Kopano convening team would have known that the City of Cape Town is not our ally if they remained in political conversation with us. More importantly, The Other Foundation, as the only public LGBTQI+ funder who is committed to protect the safety and security of LGBTQI+ people on the continent, who believes that the telling and owning of our stories is not inconsequential, must know that being uncritical of their own positionality and silencing our story in this instance is problematic. **This is especially disappointing for a funder organisation on which many local organisations depend for support and who might feel compromised should they push back against some of the decisions the Kopano convening team chose. This moment is another opportunity for us as a sector to reflect on the impact funder relationships can have on local partnerships and acts of solidarity.**

For years activists have fought for the transformation of Cape Town Pride. This included reaching out to the City of Cape Town, highlighting the inherent racist, class-based exclusion of LGBTQI+ people from Cape Town Pride. Sadly, the city failed us yet again and their responses were indefensible. This gave rise to the Khumbulani Pride initiative, a week-long event that is committed to create and sustain alternative safe spaces for LGBTQI+ people. politics are intentionally in direct opposition of Cape Town Pride. Khumbulani means "to remember". Mainstream media and civil society networks are more likely to respond to hate crimes that hold shock value and reinforce existing stereotypes of systemic violence in Black communities. It seldom reports on acts of solidarity in Black communities against homo-, trans-, intersex and xenophobia. Similarly, the mainstream media seldom report on how Black LGBTIQ+ people continue to resist and engage in transformational work to challenge homo-, trans- and intersexphobia in their own communities.

Khumbulani Pride was established to remember all the victims and survivors of hate crimes over time, as well as celebrate resistance to homo- and transphobia in local

communities. Under the leadership of Free Gender, the Khumbulani Pride network has asked the CoCT to resource Khumbulani Pride in the same way that it supports Cape Town Pride. These requests were denied. When local lesbian feminist movements like Free Gender says, the city doesn't represent us, believe them.

LGBTQI+ people who live on the streets of Cape Town are facing another cruel, cold winter in a heartless, unjust city. They find themselves at the mercy of a city that excludes, criminalises and brutalises unhoused people, a city that refuses to recognise how its actions or lack thereof, perpetuate and worsen the daily struggle for survival and dignity of its most vulnerable people. This is a city that does not want to know it is complicit in unhoused people's severe stigmatisation, deprivation, hunger, ill-health and death. When your home are the streets, bridges and small corners of this city, the city robs you of even this. It robs you of what little home, warmth and community you are able to create for yourself, choosing to ban you for your poverty. The City of Cape Town makes criminals out of unhoused LGBTQI+ people. It can fine unhoused persons up to R2000 for laying down on a cardboard box to sleep. City Law Enforcement operates with impunity, harassing, humiliating, threatening, arresting and confiscating the belongings of unhoused people.

A home is a right, not a privilege, but this is not the reality for unhoused people in Cape Town. LGBTQI+ youth are homeless because they are kicked out of family homes for who they are. But LGBTQI+ people have nowhere to turn for a roof over their heads due to lack of shelters. There are five times more people struggling with homelessness than there are shelter beds. Even those shelter beds are seldom accessible to LGBTQI+ people, who face systemic transphobia, homophobia and intersexphobia in shelters. If LGBTQI+ people are sex workers or use drugs, access to shelters and services become even more impossible.

What is needed, is not merely more shelters that are inclusive and non-discriminatory, but social housing that can be easily accessed by the city's most marginalised populations, including unhoused LGBTQI+ people, sex workers and people who use drugs. This should be in areas that are acceptable to unhoused communities and where they can sustain a livelihood. But provision of accessible, acceptable social housing that preserve the community support networks of unhoused people is not a priority for the City of Cape Town.

The city of Cape Town is NOT our ALLY!

We are infuriated by the City's continued unresponsiveness to the issues and concerns raised by unhoused people and their advocacy movements. We want to see urgent action by the City to reform its bylaws that are turning homeless people into criminals. These injustices must end! We want to see enough shelters, social housing, health and support services, and economic opportunities for unhoused people, and these need to be fully inclusive of the human rights and needs of LGBTQI+ people,

sex workers and people who use drugs. Until this happens, we cannot justify or accept a space where the City of Cape Town is allowed to posture and pretend to be an Ally to ALL LGBTIQ+ people.

A key lesson the Local Working group for the 2019 LBQ Feminist conference learnt is the importance of consulting on the spaces we choose to bring our communities in and the importance of acknowledging when limited consultation (un)consciously left us complacent in the oppression of members of our own community. This is another moment and opportunity for us as a community (in its fullness) to honestly reflect on the politics of entering space and the importance of showing solidarity to local organisers and movements who will be left behind to continue forging forward against unjust cities and systems, after the celebrations have ended.

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Ends.