
PUBLIC STATEMENT ON SCMP ARTICLE: ‘HONG KONG’S TOP INVESTMENT BANKS REJECT PETITION FOR SAME-SEX SPOUSAL VISAS’

Community Business Clarifies the Support on LGBT rights by Financial Institutions in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, Updated on 19 Oct, 2016 – In an article published first online by the South China Morning Post (SCMP) on 2 October 2016, entitled ‘Goldman Sachs, HSBC among 12 banks declining to support Hong Kong petition on equal visa rights for same-sex married couples’ and in print on 3 October 2016, which has since been changed to the title ‘Hong Kong’s top investment banks reject petition for same-sex spousal visas’, Hong Kong’s top international banks were called out for not signing an online petition that Community Business set up to garner public support for our call for the Hong Kong government to amend the current immigration policy, which does not recognise foreign-registered same-sex partnerships and marriages for immigration purposes – particularly as regards the granting of dependent visas. This was just before the “QT” case was due to be heard in the High Court in May 2015, in which a woman was challenging this policy.

In this article, Fern Ngai, CEO of Community Business was misquoted as saying:

“Everyone was asked to sign the petition, but the banks’ legal and compliance departments were not supportive. They are afraid there might be negative consequences; it might be seen to be a move against the government.” She was also quoted as confirming that “all but one of the banks approached refused to sign”.

The accurate version of Community Business’ position on this is as follows:

The online petition, set up in May 2015 to garner support for the QT case, is open to the public and we encouraged everyone to sign. We communicated widely about the petition through emails, and through our regular updates, including our Connect newsletter and our monthly update to our Diversity & Inclusion in Asia (DIAN) members, as well as on our various social media platforms.

Over 1,400 individuals and organisations signed, as well as some influential groups such as ASIFMA and the American Chamber of Commerce. In terms of why so few banks signed, it could be attributed to a number of factors including having to go through internal legal and compliance approval processes, or that an online public petition may not be an appropriate channel for advocating for change, for example, in government policies or for LGBT rights. Not signing the petition does not necessarily indicate lack of support for LGBT rights.

We have never stated that any of the banks named in the SCMP article “refused to sign” the petition as they were not specifically targeted to sign the petition by Community Business.

Community Business works with the banks and other leading companies on LGBT inclusion, and what many are doing to create safe, inclusive workplaces for their LGBT employees is exemplary and to be

commended. Even with the absence in Hong Kong of legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status, these leading companies are providing their LGBT employees with same-sex benefits and implementing inclusive policies and measures that go above and beyond the law and benefit all their employees. The fact that these companies dominate our LGBT Workplace Inclusion Index and Awards shows their leadership and commitment. In fact, the Hong Kong LGBT+ Interbank Forum, of which all banks mentioned are members, is one of the key organisations driving real and positive change within the finance and banking sector.

In our long-standing experience working with the business sector on diversity and inclusion, it is our view that no one in the Hong Kong business community has been doing more than the financial services industry to promote and advocate positive change in favour of LGBT rights and same-sex spousal recognition.

It is our hope that Hong Kong can truly be seen as Asia's world city in supporting LGBT rights. This can only be achieved through concerted collective action by all, including the business community, advocacy groups and the Hong Kong SAR government.

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About Community Business

Community Business is a not-for-profit organisation (Hong Kong Charity Number 91/6560) whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to have a positive impact on people and communities. A recognized leader in promoting responsible and inclusive business practices in Asia, Community Business conducts research, facilitates networks and events, leads campaigns and provides consultancy and training. Our focus on responsible business is aligned to 5 mission-led themes:

- Investing and supporting local communities
- Tackling inequality in the workplace
- Ensuring happy, healthy, and engaged employees
- Promoting social inclusion
- Building responsible business partnership

Founded in 2003 and based in Hong Kong with a presence in India and the United Kingdom, Community Business works with companies of all sizes and from diverse industries across Asia, harnessing the power of business to drive social change. For more information, please visit <http://www.communitybusiness.org>.