



Date: January 6th, 2025

Subject: Re: Call for Written Statements to ICCPR - Antigua and Barbuda

Organization: EcoShores Sustainable Futures Network

Organization Background:

EcoShores Sustainable Futures Network (ESFN) is a registered non-profit organization based in Antigua and Barbuda, uniquely positioned at the crossroads of climate justice, technology, and human rights advocacy. Our mission is to empower women, girls, youth, and vulnerable groups by addressing systemic inequalities through targeted interventions and innovation. As champions of sustainable development, ESFN combines education, engagement, and empowerment to tackle the challenges faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean, fostering a future where equity and justice prevail. The organization focuses on connectivity with technology and how innovation impacts development for women, girls, youth, and other vulnerable groups at the nexus of climate justice interventions. While our mandate is broad for the communities we serve, ESFN is targeted in the pillars of approach, which include: Education, Experience, Expression, Economy, Engagement, Empowerment, Environment, and Equity.

In the wider Caribbean and Antigua and Barbuda, there is still concern over human rights in the following areas that the organization has identified and will aim to receive support in addressing: Freedom of Speech and Expression, Equality Under the Law, Non-discrimination, Liberty and Security of Persons, Environmental Justice, and Protections available to vulnerable groups. While there are programs that work to address these issues, they remain insufficient given the multifaceted nature of the disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. This is not exclusively an issue for Antigua and Barbuda but a factor of being a Small Island Developing State, and the limitations of the landscape to support corrective action in alignment with these rights and its enforcement.



## Issues faced in Antigua and Barbuda related to the ICCPR

While Antigua and Barbuda is a signatory to the ICCPR, the country faces ongoing challenges in improving the implementation of these rights due to several factors.

### Freedom of Expression, Opinion, & Association

While several media platforms exist, many are affiliated with political figures, and there are fewer independent media houses. There is a need for increased nonpartisan media coverage that objectively reviews events and provides audiences with the reassurance that information is neutral and unbiased.

ESFN aims to address this need by working with and providing training opportunities for new and upcoming journalists to offer objective news coverage, while also giving space for opinion columns and open public commentary. Structuring news articles to highlight intersecting issues while equipping the audience with tools to connect facts and impactful journalism. Individuals who write political commentary often fear backlash for their critiques, leading them to use pseudonyms or aliases to protect themselves and their affiliates from unwarranted criticism.

Additionally, freedom of association is sometimes limited for activists advocating for rights such as LGBTQ+ and women's rights. To improve this issue, change must begin with fostering a culture of mutual respect and open dialogue. Creating spaces where individuals can share diverse views and perspectives without fear of judgment is essential, emphasizing a constructive "agree to disagree" approach.

Encouraging open-mindedness and understanding will be key to driving societal progress and reducing stigma. In a digital age, cyberbullying is often linked to freedom of speech. We recommend revising defamation laws to align with international standards and strengthening protections for activists and independent journalists. These measures could include



whistleblower protection frameworks, clear anti-retaliation policies, and support systems for individuals facing harassment or threats. Collaborative efforts between civil society, government, and the private sector can also promote media literacy and awareness campaigns to reduce societal polarization.

ESFN is committed to bridging the gaps in media representation and promoting freedom of expression and association. By empowering journalists, advocating for policy reforms, and fostering a culture of open dialogue, ESFN envisions a society where diverse voices can be heard, respected, and valued. These efforts align with our broader mission to support inclusive and equitable community development across Antigua and Barbuda and other Caribbean nations.

### Non-discrimination

In Antigua and Barbuda, discrimination is experienced based on sexual orientation, ability, and socioeconomic status. Civil society organizations are working on these issues locally to generate avenues of empowerment and equal access to work, social welfare, and other essential resources.

#### Discrimination within the Education Environment

Prejudices exist even among students in educational environments, where exposure to different practices and perspectives has caused social exclusion and acceptance issues. This emphasizes how urgently inclusive laws and awareness campaigns are needed to promote a better appreciation and respect for diversity to prevent discrimination.

#### Discrimination within Infrastructure Development

These can be addressed through infrastructure development by ensuring ramps are available for persons with disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women, for example. While Antigua and Barbuda has implemented accessible parking spaces in town centers, this effort should be extended to all government and privately owned buildings by updating and



enforcing building codes. Additionally, facilities should be upgraded to meet accessibility standards and address these challenges. An example of this is a local church, which implemented wheelchair-accessible elevators on all building levels to assist the elderly and persons with disabilities in accessing areas throughout the building. In addition to upgrading buildings, there needs to be a focus on transportation.

While there are wheelchair vans and taxis, these accommodations are not accessible to persons of all financial backgrounds. Increasing accessibility within public transportation will significantly benefit the country in being more equitable to all persons in helping them get the essential resources needed to work in society.

Legislative gaps in anti-discrimination laws contribute to unequal treatment in employment, education, and access to public services. A review of these policies to aid in the implementation of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and bolstering enforcement strategies to guarantee equal rights and protections is recommended. To further address discrimination and promote inclusivity in Antigua and Barbuda, the prioritizing and support of the following can be considered:

- Implement national campaigns and programs that focus on diversity acceptance and tolerance behaviors to address societal biases and promote a better understanding and respect for all individuals, regardless of their differences. A potential model for such a program is Scotland's 'respectful' anti-bullying service, which is fully funded by their government and could be adapted to address discrimination and promote tolerance within the context of Antigua and Barbuda.
- Establish independent organizational units to investigate and address complaints, ensuring a fair and impartial process for all parties involved.
- Strengthen collaborations with and between civil society groups to raise awareness and improve accessibility of anti-discrimination resources for all citizens. These initiatives complement existing efforts and contribute to



a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone feels valued and respected.

With ESFN's emphasis on technology and innovation, the organization could receive support to develop mobile applications or digital platforms for tracking and reporting discrimination instances and providing connectivity to legal assistance, mental health support, and community networking resources. These tools would enhance accessibility and empower individuals to take action against discrimination.

ESFN can drive meaningful change by integrating these initiatives with its ongoing focus on climate justice, community development, and local citizen empowerment. These efforts will align with the organization's mission to create a more equitable society, ensuring that every individual, regardless of ability, orientation, or socioeconomic status, has the opportunity to thrive.

#### Liberty & Security of Person

Individuals in Antigua and Barbuda have the right to personal security and freedom. However, there remains concern over interactions with law enforcement personnel and safeguards against abuse of authority. Vulnerable groups such as youth and migrants are particularly at risk due to limited local civil education and opportunities to interact with these law enforcement agencies.

Increased opportunities to connect with law enforcement should be provided at various levels to build mutual respect and understanding. This will lead to improved access to citizen reporting and cooperation. A few ways this could be achieved are through joint police-community initiatives, such as regular neighborhood walks and community meetings. These help foster interaction between residents and law enforcement while building familiarity and trust. Anonymous helplines, such as Antigua's "Crime Stoppers," can be improved by incorporating a mobile application version and accompanying public awareness campaigns. Seminars or training sessions, where officers are given sensitivity training



in how to appropriately interact with victims and/or alleged criminals in a way that reduces escalation, particularly in minor situations, should be considered. Establishing safe spaces where community members can interact with officers and share information in a non-threatening environment is critical.

Additionally, law enforcement should promote transparency by publishing articles on successful community interventions to increase program visibility and encourage greater participation. To reinforce transparency and accountability, law enforcement agencies should publicize positive outcomes of community cooperation, such as successful interventions or crime resolutions. Highlighting these stories through public articles or social media can boost the program's visibility and encourage greater community participation.

These measures align with the principles of fairness and security while fostering stronger partnerships between law enforcement and the public. By building trust and enhancing accountability, Antigua and Barbuda can ensure that all citizens feel protected and respected, contributing to a more cohesive and just society.

ESFN sees the creation of safe spaces for dialogue between law enforcement and the community as an extension of our Expression and Equity pillars. These spaces allow individuals to voice concerns, provide feedback, and contribute to shaping a justice system that works for everyone. Publicizing successful community-law enforcement collaborations also aligns with our Engagement and Empowerment pillars, demonstrating the tangible benefits of cooperation while encouraging broader participation.

By tying these initiatives to our core values and mission, ESFN remains dedicated to driving meaningful change that fosters safety, inclusivity, and collaboration within Antigua and Barbuda and the wider Caribbean region.



## Equality Before the Law

### Gender-based Issues

Gender-based discrimination and inequality exist throughout the Caribbean, and Antigua and Barbuda is no exception. Particularly in areas such as property rights, employment, and access to justice for women who do not have access to monetary resources to sustain their court cases. There are hindrances with forensic testing where the burden of proof rests with the victim and their families of crimes such as rape and murder. Trials under the judicial system are lengthy, taking multiple years to resolve, and depending on the case, individuals are sometimes incarcerated due to public outcry before trials are concluded.

Women are marginalized through these processes and, even when they seek refuge in services such as shelters, their participation is often discouraged by social stigma and traditional family norms. The issue of non-discrimination in access to justice for women has a significant role to play in gender equality. Women are often told their reports are not substantial or are wrongly filed, with less consideration for cultural differences, lack of awareness, or emotional state.

As part of the larger effort to promote gender equality, ESFN will assist in addressing these gender-based barriers to access justice by supporting survivors of violence through legal aid networks and providing them with access to information on navigating the court system and improving their understanding of what is required to process their cases successfully.

### LGBTQ+ Rights

The status of LGBTQ+ rights in Antigua and Barbuda remains a significant human rights concern, as homophobia and transphobia persist in society. There are widespread discriminatory attitudes that prevent LGBTQ+ individuals from fully enjoying their rights to freedom of expression,



association, and privacy. Same-sex relationships are not legally recognized, and LGBTQ+ persons face harassment and discrimination in various sectors, including employment and healthcare.

## Refugees

A small number of refugees and asylum seekers are displaced by civil unrest and wars in their countries of origin. Their experiences are often compounded by a lack of understanding about their rights and the appropriate measures to assist them. Refugees often feel isolated and excluded from the community, limiting their access to social services and legal protections.

## Recommendations

- Create legislation to improve transparency and equal treatment before the law and civil protection.
- Adopt international standards for judicial training on gender sensitivity, trauma-informed care, and the inclusion of marginalized groups.
- Implement outreach programs in schools, communities, and social centers to improve education on civil rights.
- Strengthen support for women, LGBTQ+ individuals, refugees, and people with disabilities, and advocate for an inclusive legal framework.

ESFN is committed to advocating for and supporting efforts to achieve legal reforms, improve social inclusion, and ensure equal access to justice for all citizens.

At ESFN, we recognize the significant role that human rights play in the advancement of a society, especially when intersected with the challenges faced by those in the most vulnerable categories. Addressing these critical areas will build a more inclusive, just, and equitable nation for all Antiguans and Barbudans. Through our continued advocacy, education,





and empowerment initiatives, we are committed to helping Antigua and Barbuda better uphold the principles of the ICCPR and realize the benefits of sustainable, equitable development for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Britney McDonald".

Britney McDonald  
Executive Director  
EcoShores Sustainable Futures Network





## References

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5. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). *Gender equality in the Caribbean: Challenges and opportunities*. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org>
6. Legal Aid Services. (n.d.). *Access to justice for vulnerable populations*. Ministry of Justice, Antigua and Barbuda.