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Panama signals it will comply with landmark LGBT rights ruling

The government of Panama has signaled it plans to comply with a landmark Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling that recognizes same-sex marriage and transgender rights.

Vice President Isabel de Saint Malo on Tuesday announced the Panamanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified all government agencies about the ruling. She pointed out to reporters [during a Panama City press conference](#) that the Panamanian Constitution “guarantees the principle of nondiscrimination as the court’s ruling has in fact established.”

“We are sure that with it we will be able to advance an agenda of equity and nondiscrimination even further,” added Saint Malo, [according to TVN, a Panamanian television station](#).

The court [issued its landmark ruling](#) on Jan. 9 in response to the Costa Rican government’s request for an advisory opinion on whether it has an obligation to extend property rights to same-sex couples and allow trans people to change their name and gender marker on identity documents.

The Organization of American States, which is based in D.C., created the Costa Rica-based court in 1979 in order to enforce provisions of the American Convention on Human Rights. The Jan. 9 ruling is legally binding in Panama and the 19 other countries that currently recognize the convention.

“She is complying with the opinion itself that calls upon member states to adjust national law and practices to implement the full human rights protections for LGBTI people,” Iván Chanis Barahona, president of Fundación Iguales, a Panamanian advocacy group, told the Washington Blade on Wednesday from Panama City. “This decision of the Panamanian government is consistent with a long tradition of international support and respect of the inter-American human rights system, and Panama’s recognition of the binding, ipso facto jurisdiction of the court on all matters relating to the interpretation or application of the American Convention on Human Rights.”

The Panama Supreme Court in 2017 heard oral arguments in a case that would extend marriage rights to same-sex couples. Chanis — a lawyer who lived in D.C. for seven years and worked with the Organization of American States before returning to Panama in 2016 — is working pro bono on it.

“We have a really solid case,” he told the Blade last September [during an interview in Panama City](#).

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