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**Cc:** Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chief Executive of Arts Council England,  
Managing Director of London Symphony Orchestra, Trustees of London Symphony Orchestra

London, 9 April 2014

Dear Mr Mackenzie

### **Why Valery Gergiev's current position as Principal Conductor of the LSO is untenable**

We are writing to express the concerns of many people from the Ukrainian community and the LGBT community in the UK relating to the actions of Valery Gergiev, the London Symphony Orchestra's Principal Conductor. Our organisations are united in condemning his stance on Russia's Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill 2013 and his public support for Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Evidence of his staunch support for the regime responsible for these attacks on democracy and human rights is set out below.

For an individual such as Mr Gergiev, whom you employ in such a prestigious role at a leading, publicly-funded cultural institution, these actions are completely unacceptable. It is our view that you, as Chairman of the Board of Directors of LSO, should demand that, as a minimum, he revoke his public support for Mr Putin's domestic and international policies which go against the UK's values of tolerance, protection of human rights, and democracy, and indeed, have been condemned by the UK Government.

### **Facts about Valery Gergiev**

On 10 September 2013, Mr Gergiev's comments on Russia's Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill 2013 appeared on the Dutch news website, Volkskrant<sup>1</sup>. He said "In Russia we do everything we can to protect children from paedophiles. This law is not about homosexuality, it targets paedophilia."

The Bill has been condemned by groups such as the Peter Tatchell Foundation and Amnesty International for the way it equates homosexuality with paedophilia, restricts freedom of expression, and has already resulted in countless anti-gay attacks on LGBT citizens in Russia.

In March 2014, Mr Gergiev signed an open letter published on the Russian Federation's Ministry of Culture website "declaring adamant support for the position of the Russian President toward Ukraine and Crimea<sup>2</sup>". In doing so, he is explicitly giving his public support to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the military invasion and annexation of Crimea, which violates at least four international treaties, and has been unequivocally condemned by the UK Government<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3506772/2013/09/10/Gergiev-Drie-dagen-te-weinig-voor-mijn-festival.dhtml>

<sup>2</sup> <http://mkrf.ru/press-tsentr/novosti/ministerstvo/deyateli-kultury-rossii-v-podderzhku-pozitsii-prezidenta-po-ukraine-i-krymu>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-condemns-russias-recognition-of-crimea-as-a-sovereign-state>

## Questions about Valery Gergiev

1) Why is the London Symphony Orchestra employing a man whose public support for anti-gay policies and illegal military action clearly goes against the values of diversity, tolerance and respect that the UK's artistic community prides itself on? This anomaly can only serve to be detrimental to the reputation of the London Symphony Orchestra, and by association, the Barbican, Arts Council England, and DCMS as providers of funding.

2) How can the London Symphony Orchestra justify using public money to employ Valery Gergiev as Principal Conductor when he is still publicly allowing his name to be used in support of Putin's military aggression in Ukraine, and is yet to row back from his endorsement of President Putin and his regime's active discrimination against gay people? Arts Council England lottery money is meant to be distributed to 'good causes'. How can a man prepared to publish messages of support for a regime like the one currently in the Kremlin be considered a 'good cause'?

3) Intolerance, aggression, disregard for the rule of law and democratic processes - are these the values we want reflected in our leading cultural institutions? How many people in audiences at the Barbican would support Gergiev's unquestioning endorsement of a militaristic authoritarian like Vladimir Putin?

## Conclusions

Mr Gergiev needs to decide which he feels more strongly about: (1) supporting the values of his country's President, Vladimir Putin, or (2) supporting the values and protecting the reputation of his current employer, the London Symphony Orchestra, which receives over £2m Arts Council public funding per year.

It is our view that Mr Gergiev's current position is untenable and he should be suspended with immediate effect until he officially withdraws his name from the list published on the Russian Culture Ministry's website and fully explains his position on the Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill.

If he decides he is not prepared to do this, his employment should be terminated as he is not an appropriate person to be in receipt of UK public funding. He supports discriminatory legislation which goes against the UK values of equality and diversity, and he supports Russian military action which the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have unequivocally condemned.

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

**Andy Hunder**

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**Peter Tatchell**

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