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## International Human Rights Defense Act

*Supporters: Advocates for Youth, American Jewish World Service, Human Rights Campaign, and Human Rights First*

In the last several years, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality movement experienced a number of major triumphs, including nationwide access to same-sex marriage in the United States. Yet, in other countries, the global movement for equality suffered a number of serious setbacks. In 2013, Russia enacted a ban on arbitrarily-defined "homosexual propaganda," endangering the freedoms of many LGBT persons and their allies. That same year, India's Supreme Court overturned a lower court ruling and reinstated the criminalization of homosexuality in the world's second largest country.

Sadly, in 2015 the trend continued abroad. In the Middle East, LGBT communities faced an increasing crackdown under long-existing "debauchery" or "public morality" laws, and in May, Gambian President Jammeh publicly threatened to slit the throats of gay men. It is critical that the United States continue to fight for LGBT equality both at home and abroad. President Obama, as well as Secretaries of State Clinton and Kerry, have affirmed the U.S. commitment to LGBT equality as a critical component of our international human rights objectives.

Last year, President Obama appointed Randy Berry as the White House's First Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI People. While encouraging, the Special Envoy has yet to be confirmed as a permanent position, which is an important step towards continuing U.S. engagement on LGBT equality abroad, and for the development of a comprehensive strategy for addressing LGBT discrimination overseas.

The **International Human Rights Defense Act** would direct the Department of State to make international LGBT human rights a foreign policy priority and would permanently establish a position in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor responsible for coordinating that effort. The legislation was introduced in the House by Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) on January 28, 2015, and by Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) in the Senate the next day.

### Legislative Summary

This Act directs the Department of State to:

- Make preventing and responding to discrimination and violence against the LGBT community a foreign policy priority and devise a global strategy to achieve these goals.
- Coordinate efforts to promote international LGBT human rights with local advocacy groups, governments, multilateral organizations, and the private sector.
- Permanently establish the position of "Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI People" in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, which will be responsible for all inter-bureau and inter-agency coordination of the U.S. government's efforts to defend human rights for the LGBT community internationally.
- Make permanent the current practice of including a section on LGBT rights violations in the annual State Department Report on Human Rights.

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