

Five Reasons the United States Needs a State Department Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBT People

The human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people have been a top priority of the Obama Administration. President Obama's leadership has yielded advancements in the protection of the dignity and safety of LGBT people around the world through actions including the Presidential Memorandum on International Initiatives to Advance the Human Rights of LGBT Persons, and State Department sanctions responding to the passage of discriminatory legislation in Uganda. However, the battle against state-sanctioned homophobia, criminalization, hate crimes including acts of violence, and systematized discrimination will require an ongoing U.S. commitment to the rights of LGBT people through the appointment of a special envoy for the human rights of LGBT people.

1. To keep the human rights of LGBT people at the heart of U.S. foreign policy.

A special envoy would coordinate continued U.S. leadership on the global stage, upholding the focus within the U.S. government on issues affecting LGBT people – namely discrimination, persecution, and criminalization – by participating in inter-agency policy planning and elevating issues before appropriate officials as needed.

2. To lead U.S. government efforts to protect the human rights of LGBT people globally.

The appointment of a high-level special envoy would signify to foreign governments a long-term commitment by the United States to the protection of the human rights of LGBT people. The special envoy would organize U.S. activity with other governments in multilateral meetings and in specific instances of crisis. The special envoy would also navigate the extensive network of U.S. embassies and missions, providing expertise to staff as they interact with vulnerable groups.

3. To maintain key relationships with human rights defenders in hotspots of homophobia.

A special envoy would work to ascertain how U.S. foreign policy may best help vulnerable LGBT communities. Working in partnership with human rights defenders who are directly affected leads to more effective U.S. strategies to encourage

foreign governments to decriminalize homosexuality and protect the rights of their LGBT citizens. A special envoy would provide the leadership to seek out and cultivate those partnerships, in conjunction with embassies.

4. To sustain focus in those places where LGBT rights have been eclipsed by regional violence.

Even in the direst of situations and the most tumultuous of times human rights remains a core commitment of U.S. foreign policy. A special envoy would provide a consistent voice for the safety and dignity of LGBT persons in all cases.

5. To combat the notion that homosexuality is a Western idea by engaging with senior officials of foreign governments around the world.

The most homophobic nations rely on dismissing homosexuality as a lifestyle foreign to their cultural heritage, one introduced by Americans and Europeans. A special envoy would lead the charge against this notion, which legitimizes homophobia as long as it continues to prevail.

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