

The Council for Global Equality



Advancing an American Foreign Policy
Inclusive of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Global Equality Today **May 2020**

International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT).

The Council for Global Equality and our 30 member organizations joined colleagues from around the world this month in celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia on May 17. Unfortunately, we were astonished that the U.S. refused to sign a [global statement](#) on COVID-19 and the human rights of LGBTI persons that was signed by 38 other members of the [Equal Rights Coalition](#) to recognize IDAHOBIT. The U.S. also declined to sign a similar [statement](#) as a founding member of the [UN LGBTI Core Group](#).

While the United States did join an IDAHOBIT statement at the Organization of American States, it also offered troubling caveats that could be used to promote indirect discrimination against LGBTI persons in our hemisphere. And the U.S. Mission to the UN also issued a statement for IDAHOBIT this year, reaffirming that “the United States is steadfast in its commitment to the principle that all governments must respect the equality and human dignity of each person under their jurisdiction, regardless of sexual orientation.” But by choosing to exclude transgender people from that steadfast commitment, and by shunning efforts to stand collectively with our human rights allies at the United Nations, our unilateral efforts undermined rather than strengthened the international consensus. Read our blog [here](#).

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Congress calls on State Department and USAID to recognize vulnerabilities of LGBTI individuals in Covid Response. Senator Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Titus (D-NV) led 45 members of Congress in a [letter](#) urging the State Department and USAID to protect LGBTI populations during the Covid pandemic. “How our government responds will be seen as a test of our country’s commitment to the protection of human rights and American values of fairness and equality,” the lawmakers asserted.

GLOBE Act continues to gain cosponsors in the House and Senate. Senator Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Titus (D-NV) also introduced the GLOBE Act ([S.3004](#), [H.R. 3874](#)) earlier this Congress – *Greater Leadership Overseas for the Benefit of Equality* – to provide a broad roadmap to restore U.S. leadership in advancing the human rights of LGBTI and other vulnerable minority communities around the world. The House has 65 cosponsors and the Senate now has 12

cosponsors. Vice President Biden has endorsed the act in his [plan to advance LGBTQ+ equality](#). Read the Council's endorsement and a blog explaining the bill's impact [here](#).

Senate raises significant concerns over scope and objectives of Pompeo's Commission on Unalienable Rights. Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, along with 19 of his Democratic Senate colleagues, [sent a letter](#) to Secretary Pompeo to question the objectives and suppositions of his Commission on Unalienable Rights and to establish guidelines for what they expect to see in the final report, which is widely expected this July. Fearing the Commission intends to redefine our country's human rights priorities and undermine our commitments to sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of LGBTI individuals, the Senators note that the "goal of our nation's human rights work should be to protect more vulnerable groups and individuals — not fewer." Read more about our concerns and the federal lawsuit we have filed to disband this illegal Commission [here](#).

Bicameral, bipartisan bill on COVID and human rights. A bipartisan and bicameral group of legislators, including Senators Markey (D-MA), Blackburn (R-TN), Cardin (D-MD), Wicker (R-MI), and Merkley (D-OR) in the Senate, and Representatives McGovern (D-MA), Wagner (D-MO), and Malinowski (D-NJ) in the House, are introducing the *Protecting Human Rights During Pandemic Act*, which requires the State Department and USAID to leverage diplomacy and development assistance to prevent human rights abuses from being carried out under the pretense of a country's coronavirus response. (Read the press release [here](#) and a copy of the bill [here](#).) This is especially important for LGBTI individuals, as the UN expert on sexual orientation and gender identity has [warned that LGBT communities are particularly vulnerable](#) to abuse.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH ACTION

In response to Covid, the United States has shuttered our asylum system, placing LGBTI and other refugees at our border in grave peril and adding to the dangers of immigration detention for LGBTI asylum seekers already in ICE custody. Given the enormity of the Covid emergency, the Trump Administration's cruel efforts to shut down the U.S. asylum system have gone largely unnoticed. But the impact is catastrophic, especially for the most vulnerable LGBTI refugees. Read more [here](#). Meanwhile, a group of civil rights and refugee organizations is [suing the United States](#) based on our new "safe third country" agreement with Guatemala. The suit includes a gay man from El Salvador who sought asylum in the United States but was sent, over his objections, to Guatemala by U.S. officials to try to pursue his asylum claim there, despite the country's horrific record of human rights abuses against LGBTI individuals.

State Department releases annual Human Rights Reports. Released in March, the latest round of [State Department Human Rights Reports](#) reveals an all-too-familiar story of broad societal and government hostility and violence against LGBTI people around the globe. But the reports also leave an unsettling optic: is the Administration pulling its punches in addressing these

abuses, particularly those by governments of Trump's closest political allies? See our **three-part analysis**, examining the [political lapses](#) in the reports, the ways in which the [reports contradict the Trump Administration's refugee policies](#), and the continued [ghosting of any discussion of sexual and reproductive rights](#).

Administration's ambassador-designate to Uganda has Senate confirmation hearing. A career foreign service officer, Natalie E. Brown, had a virtual confirmation hearing to serve as our next U.S. ambassador to Uganda, where the criminalization and persecution of LGBTI individuals remains a leading human rights concern. Asked by Senator Kaine about her willingness to engage on LGBTI issues, she noted that the U.S. embassy has long maintained a relationship with LGBTI civil society and has not shied away from speaking out on the issues, and she pledged to continue to do so. (See the confirmation hearing [here](#) and read her prepared testimony [here](#).) This comes in the context of the [arbitrary arrest](#) and alleged torture of 20 LGBTI Ugandan youth living in a homeless shelter on spurious Covid-related public health grounds.

Chechen human rights abusers kicked off Instagram again in response to LGBTI persecution and other human rights abuses. The Kremlin-backed strongman in Chechnya and the head of a notorious "rapid response" force that organized the systematic targeting and persecution of LGBTI persons are among those who have been [kicked off of Instagram again](#) after trying repeatedly to re-subscribe. This is because of their place on the "[Magnitsky Sanctions](#)" list maintained by the Treasury Department. The move denies them access to one of their most important propaganda tools. Read more from the Treasury Department [here](#) and the State Department [here](#).

GLOBAL LGBTI DEVELOPMENTS

In recent good news...

[Zambia's president pardoned a couple](#) sentenced to 15 years in prison last November under the country's colonial-era sodomy law. The case caused serious diplomatic ripples when the U.S. ambassador condemned the sentence in strong public terms. Read more on the background of the case that led to the expulsion of the U.S. ambassador and sustained U.S. engagement [here](#).

Marriage equality became the law of the land in Costa Rica this week, due to the perseverance of activists there in the [Si Acepto campaign](#).

Due to the dogged legal advocacy of groups in Uganda, [20 LGBT homeless youth were finally released](#) from prison last week after 50 days of brutal confinement under the guise of Covid-19. They had been living together in a shelter for LGBT youth when they were detained on spurious public health charges. They were then held without bail or trial, some subjected to forced anal exams, and all were brutally treated.

In bad news...

Last week, the [Hungarian Parliament voted](#) to eliminate the ability for transgender and intersex Hungarians to legally change their gender on official documents. Orban's government has been hostile to LGBTI people and used the moment of the epidemic to push this regressive legislation forward.

The [government of Panama](#) has been utilizing a gender-based quarantine mechanism whereby men and women are allowed out on alternating days of the week. Gender-nonconforming and trans people have been facing complicated choices, harassment, and sometimes fines. Similar measures have been enacted in neighboring countries of Colombia and Peru, but they are beginning to be rolled back after community pressure.

Watch this (corona) space...

Some extremely important research is emerging regarding the particular vulnerabilities of LGBTI communities around the globe during the Covid crisis. These reports are particularly useful summaries with recommendations regarding how governments can better protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex citizens during this pandemic.

OutRight Action International's [Covid report "Vulnerability Amplified"](#)

[The Commonwealth Equality Network's report](#)

[ILGA-Europe's Covid report and resources](#)