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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Obama Administration Reverses Bush Decision on LGBT Rights at UN

Washington, DC, March 18, 2009—The Obama Administration announced today the U.S. government’s support for a UN Statement on “Human Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity,” reversing one of the final decisions of the Bush Administration last December. The UN Statement affirms the universality of human rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and calls for the decriminalization of homosexuality. Gay groups applauded this important reversal of position. “The Administration’s leadership on this issue is a rebuke of an earlier Bush Administration position that sought to deny the universal application of human rights protections to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals,” noted Mark Bromley, who chairs the Council for Global Equality.

The U.S. now joins the 66 other nations from all regions of the world that signed the statement at the UN last December, which was read by Argentina. Despite thousands of individual calls to the State Department from U.S. citizens, letters from Members of Congress, and requests from close U.S. allies, Bush Administration officials refused to join the statement, making the U.S. one of the only countries in the “Western Group” at the United Nations that did not sign onto the statement last year. “In addition to today’s announcement, we hope the United States will make a similar statement next week at the United Nation’s Human Rights Council meeting currently taking place in Geneva,” urged Julie Dorf, a Senior Advisor to the Council.

“President Obama and Secretary Clinton stand poised to remove a blemish on U.S. human rights leadership by affirming human right for all,” confirmed former U.S. Ambassador Michael Guest, another Senior Advisor to the Council for Global Equality. “This is a strong move to reassert U.S. leadership on human rights in general, while also clarifying once and for all that LGBT rights are human rights,” emphasized Guest. The Council for Global Equality is a coalition of domestic LGBT organizations and international human rights organizations that demands a clearer and stronger American voice on LGBT human rights concerns.

This important affirmation of universal rights comes just a few weeks after the State Department released an annual report to Congress that examines the human rights record of every country around the world. In that report, the Council found an unfortunate crisis in human rights abuse directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people worldwide. Based on the Council’s analysis, this year’s human rights report from the State Department was the most comprehensive to date with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity issues (referenced in 190 country reports), pointing to a growing pattern of human rights abuse directed against LGBT people around the world. In many cases, there was evidence that the police or other government officials were complicit in the crimes.

The Council for Global Equality looks forward to constructive engagement on these and other human rights issues under the new Obama Administration, since President Obama stated during the Presidential campaign that “treatment of gays, lesbians and transgender persons is part of this broader human-rights discussion,” and that it needs to be “part and parcel of any conversations we have about human rights.” And in Brussels earlier this month, Secretary Clinton assured an audience at the European Parliament that “human rights is and always will be one of the pillars of our foreign policy. In particular, persecution and discrimination against gays and lesbians is something we take very seriously.”

For the State Department’s Press Release, see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/03/120509.htm>
For photos of individuals quoted above, please see www.globalequality.org