



The Council for Global Equality

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

PRESS RELEASE

Mark Bromley – Council Chair
202-719-0511, Mark@GlobalEquality.org

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www.GlobalEquality.org

U.S. Ignores Crisis in LGBT Hate Crimes at Global Meeting

Washington, DC – October 6, 2008—Today in Warsaw, Poland, during an important regional human rights meeting, the U.S. State Department refused again to raise concerns over lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) hate crimes, nor would the State Department join other countries or non-governmental organizations in addressing LGBT violence as a legitimate human rights issue within the mandate of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

While the U.S. government chose to ignore this growing human rights crisis in the OSCE region, which includes East and West Europe and North America, Mark Bromley, Chair of the Council, noted that one of the Council's members, Human Rights First, was in Warsaw this week to release a new hate crime survey. The survey charts a striking rise in LGBT violence this year. (The report can be viewed at <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/discrimination/pages.aspx?id=157>.)

At the same meeting in Warsaw, Human Rights Watch released a report today on violent abuses targeting lesbian and bisexual women and transgender men within the OSCE region. The report focuses on abuses in Kyrgyzstan and it calls on the Kyrgyz government to acknowledge the violence and protect the victims. Human Rights Watch also called on the OSCE to respond robustly to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. (The report can be viewed at <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/10/06/kyrgyz19901.htm>.)

According to Bromley, “the lack of U.S. leadership on human rights concerns at the OSCE emboldens those who are seeking to block a more thoughtful examination of the causes, consequences and recent trends in LGBT violence, including those who would seek permanently to exclude the issue from the OSCE’s human rights mandate, which emphasizes tolerance and works with countries to respond to violence and discrimination.”

“Unfortunately, in the face of such documentation, the United States continues to stand on the diplomatic sidelines,” noted Tad Stahnke, one of the authors of the hate crime survey for Human Rights First who was in Warsaw this week to present his organization’s findings. “Given the worrying levels of LGBT violence across the OSCE region, the U.S. government must encourage all human rights institutions, including the OSCE, to address LGBT hate crimes more proactively,” countered Stahnke. At a Congressional briefing on this same topic in September, Bromley noted that “at a time when the United States seems to have lost its voice on so many human rights matters, it is sad that we have again abdicated leadership . . . in yet another international forum.”

Bromley insisted that the U.S. government’s refusal was “especially sad, given the State Department’s own human rights reporting on these issues.” A Congressionally mandated State Department report outlines human rights concerns impacting LGBT communities in more than one hundred countries this year. The report catalogues numerous LGBT-related hate crimes – some coming in the course of gay pride events – in a number of OSCE countries, including Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. Bromley called on the U.S. government to clarify its position and speak out against LGBT hate crimes at an upcoming ministerial-level meeting of the OSCE in December.

A coalition of human rights organizations wrote the State Department in August of this year to ask U.S. diplomats to begin speaking out against rising levels of hate crimes targeting LGBT communities in Europe and North America at this important European human rights meeting.