

Working to Advance the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Persons Globally

Fact Sheet

The White House Office of the Press Secretary

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“The struggle to end discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons is a global challenge, and one that is central to the United States’ commitment to promoting human rights.” – President Obama, December 6, 2011

Since taking office, President Obama has demonstrated that his vision for a brighter future includes greater equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Americans. The President and this Administration are dedicated to eliminating barriers to equality, fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and engaging LGBT communities across the country. The Administration’s dedication to LGBT rights does not stop at our borders, as the President made clear at the United Nations in September of this year when he said: “no country should deny people their rights because of who they love, which is why we must stand up for the rights of gays and lesbians everywhere.”

Today (12/6/11), President Obama issued a presidential memorandum that directs all federal agencies engaged abroad to ensure that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons. Under the Obama Administration, agencies have already begun taking action to promote the fundamental human rights of LGBT persons everywhere. And now, following an interagency process coordinated by the National Security Staff, this memorandum directs the first-ever U.S. government strategy dedicated to combating human rights abuses against LGBT persons abroad. Today’s memorandum applies to the Departments of State, the Treasury, Defense, Justice, Agriculture, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Export-Import Bank, the United States Trade Representative, and such other agencies as the President may designate.

The memorandum directs agencies to:

- Combat the criminalization of LGBT status or conduct abroad.
- Protect vulnerable LGBT refugees and asylum seekers.
- Leverage foreign assistance to protect human rights and advance nondiscrimination.
- Ensure swift and meaningful U.S. responses to human rights abuses of LGBT persons abroad.
- Engage International Organizations in the fight against LGBT discrimination.
- Report on progress.

Even before today's memo, U.S. agencies have been working to protect and promote the rights of LGBT persons around the world. Since January 2009, Secretary Clinton has directed the Department of State to champion a comprehensive human rights agenda—one that includes the protection of LGBT people.

Around the world, the State Department is:

- **Engaging** bilaterally and regionally in conjunction with U.S. embassies, civil society, and multilateral agencies to encourage countries to repeal or reform laws that criminalize LGBT conduct or status.
- **Reinforcing** the human rights of LGBT people in multilateral fora, such as the UN Human Rights Council. In June 2011, the United States joined South Africa and a cross-regional group of co-sponsors in passing the first-ever UN Human Rights Council resolution on the human rights of LGBT persons.
- **Promoting** human rights worldwide. U.S. embassies are declaring the United States' support for the human rights of LGBT people through innovative public diplomacy. Ambassadors and embassies have hosted public discussions and private roundtables, published op-eds and supported Pride events.
- **Supporting** LGBT human rights defenders and civil society groups, with programmatic and financial assistance, including efforts to document human rights violations; build advocacy skills; provide advocates with legal representation; and, when necessary, relocation support.
- **Reporting** on the conditions of human rights of LGBT people in each of its annual, country-specific Human Rights Reports.
- **Strengthening** the Department's personnel and consular policies. The Secretary extended the range of legally available benefits and allowances to same-sex domestic partners of foreign service staff serving abroad. The United States also incorporated gender identity into federal equal employment opportunity policies in 2010.
- **Protecting** LGBT refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants through a protection strategy developed with other U.S. Government agencies, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and NGOs.