



ACCESSING U.S. EMBASSIES

A Guide for LGBTQI+ Human
Rights Defenders



Accessing U.S. Embassies: A Guide for LGBTQI+ Human Rights Defenders

Council for Global Equality

The Council for Global Equality is a Washington-based advocacy coalition that promotes LGBTQI+ inclusion in U.S. foreign policy. Together, Council members seek to ensure that those who represent the United States – including those in Congress, in the White House, in U.S. embassies, and in U.S. corporations – use the diplomatic, political, and economic leverage available to them to oppose human rights abuses that are too often directed at individuals because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The Council also seeks to increase support for foreign LGBTQI+ organizations as vital contributors to free and vibrant civil societies abroad.

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President Joe Biden

“It is the policy of my Administration to combat unlawful discrimination and eliminate disparities that harm LGBTQI+ individuals and their families, defend their rights and safety, and pursue a comprehensive approach to delivering the full promise of equality for LGBTQI+ individuals.”

Executive Order on Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals

June 2022



Antony Blinken Secretary of State

“It is not just enough to stand up for LGBTQI+ rights at home. We have to continue, and we will continue to stand up for equal rights everywhere in partnership with local activists and local communities. Human rights are also central to our support for democracy around the world because any system in which some groups are treated as less than, as second-class citizens with fewer rights and protections, is fundamentally flawed.”

Pride Statement

June 2022



Jessica Stern Special Envoy

“In my role, I spread the Administration’s message about LGBTQI+ persons globally, and it is quite simple. We see you. Our LGBTQI+ friends, neighbors, and colleagues are our fellow human beings, and we will never stop working to ensure you enjoy the safety, dignity, human rights that every person deserves.”

Pride Statement

June 2022





Kenita Placide

**Executive Director,
Eastern Caribbean
Alliance for Diversity and
Equality**

“Our journey on the road to equality has not been easy or straight forward. In developing our strategy for litigation, which encompasses the filling of cases, a communication strategy, an advocacy toolkit, selfcare components and security work-plans, support from the U.S. Embassy and U.S. State Department has been felt. The U.S. Embassy's annual Human Rights report, on which we are consulted, allowed for our voice to be included and heard. The U.S. State Department's Global Equality Fund has supported research, capacity building, and overheads through the Pan-American Development Foundation. In today's world, this dialogue is still open, working and allowing for better partnerships and collaborations.”



Thato Moruti

**Chief Executive Officer of
Lesbians, Gays and
Bisexuals of Botswana –
LEGABIBO**

“The U.S. Embassy has been instrumental in movement building in Botswana and this was crucial for our registration as an organization as well as for our landmark decriminalization case. Their friendship has made it possible for LGBTQI+ individuals in Botswana to have their voices heard by funding LEGABIBO's first support groups project. Through the support of the embassy, other U.S. agencies, and other partners like CGE [Council for Global Equality], we have grown as an organization and that enabled us to mentor the LGBTQI+ movement in Botswana and the region at large. LEGABIBO played a pioneering role and acted as a role model to LGBTQI+ organizations in Botswana thanks to such support.”





Jennifer Lu

Taiwan Equality Campaign

“The United States is a strong ally and consistently supports the LGBTQI+ community here. U.S. officials listen to us, join local events, and express support publicly when we request help to raise visibility and awareness of our issues. They also try to help LGBTQI+ groups build better connections with LGBTQI+ groups in the United States. And U.S. exchange programs from the State Department provide Taiwan’s LGBTQI+ activists with great opportunities to learn more strategic thinking and sustainable development. There is no doubt that U.S. officials played an important role in supporting our local organizations in Taiwan, and they have shown their respect for local activists by following our lead to create an open atmosphere for cooperation.”



What is the Purpose of this Guide?

This guide is written by a U.S.-based non-governmental organization (NGO), the Council for Global Equality (CGE), for the use of non-U.S. NGOs. It is offered as a resource for our human rights colleagues internationally who share our mission of encouraging U.S. embassies to stand in support of fundamental human rights for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, and who seek to build a productive relationship with the U.S. embassy in their country.



What is the Council for Global Equality?

The Council for Global Equality is a Washington-based advocacy NGO that encourages a clearer and stronger American voice on international lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) human rights concerns. The Council focuses on the opportunities and impacts of U.S. foreign policy for LGBTQI+ communities abroad. As American human rights advocates, we work to ensure that those who represent the United States – in the U.S. Congress, in the White House, in U.S. embassies, and in U.S. corporations – use the diplomatic, political, and economic leverage available to them to oppose human rights abuses that are too often directed at individuals because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

The Council also seeks to increase support for foreign LGBTQI+ organizations as vital contributors to the free and vibrant civil societies abroad that we believe are in the national interest of the United States and, indeed, of an increasingly interconnected world. As U.S. citizens, we believe that other countries that strive to protect the rights of all of their citizens, including those that are LGBTQI+, make stronger global partners for the United States, and that truly inclusive societies hold the best prospects for stability, economic advancement, and equality.

Read more about our organizational members [here](#).

This guide is intended as a resource manual for LGBTQI+ activists and NGOs to help them understand how U.S. embassies work; how to call on U.S. diplomats to support their human rights goals; how to access U.S. support, including both technical and financial support; and how to frame requests in ways that will appeal to strategic U.S. priorities. The guide also emphasizes the limits of U.S. embassy support and the potential that exists for backlash in some hostile environments. By presenting both the opportunities and potential pitfalls of U.S. embassy engagement and by highlighting those with concrete examples, the Council aims to provide both the information and the context that will allow individual human rights defenders to decide for themselves whether they want to approach U.S. embassies as partners in their work.



This guide is intended as a resource manual for LGBTQI+ activists and NGOs to help them understand how U.S. embassies work; how to call on U.S. diplomats to support their human rights goals; how to access U.S. support, including both technical and financial support; and how to frame requests in ways that will appeal to strategic U.S. priorities.

It is important to note that the Council offers this guide with great humility, recognizing the ongoing struggle for full equality that remains to be waged – and won – here in the United States. Indeed, the perspectives in this guide are very much grounded in our own ongoing domestic battles for greater security, opportunity, and recognition for LGBTQI+ Americans, including recent backsliding in the recognition of those rights for transgender Americans. This includes our desire to draw more connections between our domestic struggle for equality and the defense of democratic institutions in the United States and those of colleagues elsewhere in the world.



The disproportionate power of the United States, and the sheer scale of U.S. diplomatic engagement around the world

makes it imperative that as a U.S.-based NGO, we partner with global advocates seeking to engage with the U.S. government.

We also recognize that political cycles in the United States will continue to impact the reception that LGBTQI+ advocates receive from their local U.S. embassy. Every presidential administration prioritizes slightly different human rights objectives and slightly different strategies for achieving those objectives. And certainly, the Trump Administration took unprecedented steps to undermine the very foundations of human rights by attacking the institutions, norms, and treaties of our movement. Effective advocates will tailor their requests to the themes that resonate most effectively with the president in power, recognizing that requests that landed on deaf ears within the Trump Administration are being given careful attention today in the Biden Administration. ([See Chapter 2: How to Frame Your Requests to U.S. Embassies.](#))

Even under relatively hostile U.S. presidents, however, some political and financial support may still be possible. The Global Equality Fund, which funds global LGBTQI+ needs through the U.S. State Department, grew in both the size of its funding commitments and in the reach and diversity of its funded programs under the Trump Administration. The United States also continued to participate in the “UN Core Group” of nations that support human rights for LGBTQI+ individuals at the United Nations (UN), and the United States under Trump also remained a leading voice in the Equal Rights Coalition, an intergovernmental coalition of 40 governments and leading civil society organizations that work together to protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ people around the world.

It is also worth recognizing — again with humility — that the engagement of U.S. embassies on these issues represents a relatively recent and still-inconsistent shift in U.S. foreign policy, advancing significantly with the Obama Administration and then backsliding significantly under the Trump Administration, to accelerate and hopefully stabilize under the Biden Administration. Under the Trump Administration, there was understandable confusion about U.S. commitments to human rights generally and even greater inconsistency regarding the importance any particular embassy or consulate placed on LGBTQI+ equality matters. Unfortunately, U.S. embassies will not always be consistent in how they prioritize our country’s human rights commitments or our country’s embrace of the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. We nonetheless offer this guide in the spirit of extending every possible opportunity for LGBTQI+ human rights defenders to partner with U.S. embassies in supporting equal rights and opportunities around the world.



Please provide any feedback or examples of your work with U.S. embassies directly to Council staff at info@globalequality.org. We depend on your feedback to improve our advocacy, and, in turn, we look forward to offering our support to your own advocacy priorities.

Finally, we recognize that the real power for change lies with you and many other human rights defenders doing this crucial work. We understand that building relationships with the embassies can be daunting, and at times, such relationships have power dynamics that can be intimidating. Nonetheless, the embassies need guidance, leadership, and partnership from civil society to provide meaningful support. Many human rights officers at the embassy work on broad human rights issues, and some have little-to-no understanding of LGBTQI+ issues. They rely on local activists' knowledge, perspectives, and leadership to provide meaningful support or build an effective partnership. You have the power to create change locally and ensure that partners like the U.S. — through U.S. embassies — provide meaningful support that addresses your needs as you identify and prioritize them.

We rededicate this third edition of our guide to building stronger and more creative partnerships between U.S. embassies and LGBTQI+ defenders abroad. We look forward to collecting feedback and case studies to help record examples of successful partnerships with U.S. embassies as they emerge – and cautionary tales when they occasionally backfire, as some will.

1

What Do U.S. Embassies Do? How Can You Partner with a U.S. Embassy or Consulate Near You to Advance LGBTQI+ Human Rights?

Globally, the United States maintains approximately 265 diplomatic and consular posts, staffed by more than 14,000 professionals in the U.S. Foreign Service.¹ These posts manage U.S. global relationships, while also promoting U.S. strategic interests and cooperation with other countries. Embassy officials report to the State Department in Washington, but they also have broad autonomy to interact with and support local communities.

Support for universal human rights is a long-standing pillar of U.S. foreign policy, and as former President Barack Obama once said, LGBTQI+ rights are now “part and parcel” of our human rights dialogue in every country. Even if in the past U.S. embassies have not been LGBTQI+ friendly, they now are directed to reach out to LGBTQI+ communities, especially where LGBTQI+ individuals have been targeted for violence or otherwise marginalized in their ability to participate in the political, economic, or social life of their



"LGBTQI+ rights are now 'part and parcel' of our human rights dialogue in every country."

Barack Obama, Former
President of United States.



own country. In 2021, the Biden administration released a [Presidential Memorandum](#) on Advancing the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ People Around the World. The memorandum builds upon a similar memorandum that was released by the Obama administration in 2011. The Biden memorandum directs executive departments and agencies engaged abroad to ensure that United States diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons everywhere.

U.S. embassy support for LGBTQI+ human and civil rights reflect, in part, America’s historic attempt to support fundamental freedoms – of speech, of assembly, and of expression – to which we believe all people are entitled by right of birth. These freedoms are rooted in the U.S. Constitution, and they enjoy strong bipartisan support even amid contentious political squabbles in Washington. More recently, the United States also has tried to speak for the rights of marginalized communities, believing that truly inclusive societies are our best partners in advancing shared democratic goals. They also make for more dynamic economic partners.

¹ The figures come from a useful resource for additional information: Shawn Dorman (ed.), [How U.S. Embassies Work: Inside a U.S. Embassy](#), 3rd edition (American Foreign Service Association, 2011).

This human rights work is not simply the responsibility of one lone, human rights-focused staff person in each U.S. embassy. In their various functions, all U.S. embassy personnel, including the U.S. ambassador, should reflect U.S. principles and values in their work. Ending the marginalization and abuse of LGBTQI+ individuals is intrinsically related to many of the larger goals that U.S. embassies are charged to advocate and advance.

U.S. embassies and consulates in each country have a number of tools by which to analyze and respond to LGBTQI+-focused human rights concerns. This chapter will explore the traditional tools that are used by diplomats worldwide, with a focus on the various steps involved in identifying, discussing, denouncing, and protecting against violations.

Human Rights Reporting

The first step in activating a U.S. embassy is to persuade the embassy that there is a problem or an opportunity where important human rights issues are at stake. One of the best ways to do that is by working with embassy officials to include information on LGBTQI+ human rights violations in the human rights reports that each embassy is required to write every year.

The State Department is required by law to report to Congress on the human rights landscape as well as religious freedom in every country in which it has a diplomatic or consular post. The annual reports are public documents and can be found on the State Department's human rights website at [Human Rights Reports](#) and at [Religious Freedom Reports](#).



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Beginning with the 2009 report, embassies have been required to include a specific section discussing "societal abuses, discrimination, and acts of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity." That section of the report highlights LGBTQI+-related incidents in nearly every country. The abuses include arbitrary arrests and detentions, police abuse, rape, murder, social exclusion, impediments to political participation, discriminatory health practices, and trends in employment discrimination that exclude citizens from the economic life of their own country. More recently, these reports also include detailed information on gender identity recognition, so-called conversion therapy practices, and violations against intersex persons.

The first drafts of these reports are prepared by staff in each U.S. embassy beginning in September; they are then sent to Washington for review and editing. We encourage you to reach out and set up a meeting with the embassy's human rights reporting officer as early as July or August to provide information to be included in the State Department's annual human rights report for that calendar year. You should be able to phone the embassy and ask for "the human rights reporting officer." More often than not, that person will work in the Political Section of the embassy. As a frontline human rights defender, if an in-person meeting is too dangerous for you or your work, you should be able to speak with the reporting officer on the phone and then send any additional information via email to support your assessment.



Embassy phone numbers are available on the State Department website at <http://www.usembassy.gov/>



If you have difficulty connecting with the reporting officer, you can email the Council at info@globalequality.org, and we can help make that initial contact.

Please be clear with all embassy personnel and with the Council about the level of perceived threat to you and/or others and the importance of keeping your communication confidential.

The State Department's annual religious freedom report adopts a broad definition of religious freedom, including the right to change or reject religious beliefs. We therefore urge that you provide information to the embassy on LGBTQI+-affirming religious institutions or leaders who have been attacked or otherwise impeded in their efforts to practice their faith or support LGBTQI+ parishioners in their ministries. We similarly urge you to report on the ways in which dominant religious laws or institutions have directly and negatively impacted your rights as an LGBTQI+ individual or religious community.

To date, the annual religious freedom report has included very little information on the many prohibitions that limit LGBTQI+ communities and LGBTQI+-affirming ministries from practicing their faith, including the decision of any religious congregation to marry or sanctify the relationships of same-sex couples. Nor have the religious freedom reports contained much information on the use of religiously justified laws to persecute LGBTQI+ individuals or faith institutions. We are currently focusing on the collection of such information to inform future religious freedom reports and would appreciate your partnership in submitting those stories to U.S. embassies.

For both the human rights report and the religious freedom report, if you are able to meet directly with embassy staff, you may wish to bring materials with you to the meeting that will help inform the final reports. These should include relevant newspaper clippings, human rights reports, and a short (one-page) summary of your overall view of LGBTQI+-related developments or religious freedom perspectives over the past year.

Consider the following questions:



Did the situation get better for LGBTQI+ citizens over the past year?



Did it get worse? You should also highlight any important trends.

For example, you might note whether police harassment or arrests have increased in certain cities or regions, or whether violence has been disproportionately directed at one group within the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex community. Finally, note any specific cases of detention, arrest, murder, or other abuse that you believe the report should reference specifically by name and detail.

One important point to consider is whether it will be helpful or harmful to have the U.S. embassy cite specific cases or incidents in the annual report. In many instances, it may be useful to have the report refer to a specific case of arrest or violence, thereby putting your government and the larger world on notice that the U.S. government is following the case and considers it to be a bilateral human rights concern. At other times, however, such U.S. attention could actually be harmful to the individual in question, and in extreme cases, this could prompt local authorities to increase the sentence or the severity of the person's detention. You and other local LGBTQI+ advocates will be in the best position to decide whether a specific mention by the U.S. government in a public document – one that may be read by members of your government or that may be noted in the local press – will be helpful or harmful. The human rights officer with whom you speak should be sensitive to this point and should respond to any request you make either to emphasize or to withhold names and details about a specific case or incident.

Final versions of the human rights report are typically released in Washington in March or April. The religious freedom reports are typically released around June of each year. If there are any last-minute updates or incidents to report, please be sure to provide them to your local embassy contact; if they fall outside of editing deadlines, they nonetheless can be used in the following year's report.



An important question to consider is how you and your organization might use the State Department report, once released, to lend additional credibility or momentum to your own local advocacy agenda.

Some LGBTQI+ human rights advocates have used the release of the report as an opportunity to meet with their own governments and open a new dialogue on LGBTQI+ issues. Knowing that the U.S. embassy is following your work can create new allies – or at least new advocacy opportunities – in government. In some countries, foreign ministry officials have become unlikely allies on LGBTQI+ issues because they recognize the reputational and foreign policy implications of their domestic LGBTQI+ practices. U.N. human rights experts also read the reports and may be interested in additional meetings with you to discuss the report and opportunities to support your work. Don't be afraid to use the release of the report as an opportunity to start a dialogue with local representatives of the United Nations, especially in the lead up to a periodic review before the U.N. Human Rights Council or a review by a U.N. treaty body ([see more on this in Chapter 4](#)), or with any other domestic or international human rights advocates who may be working in your country.

It is important to be aware that the release of the report could also have negative implications for you or your work. By elevating domestic LGBTQI+ issues to the level of a foreign policy concern with the United States, your government could come to see you as a threat to its own legitimacy, development funding, or foreign policy priorities. You should prepare for the good and for the bad, as only you will be able to identify both the possibilities and the risks. If you do believe that you will be at risk of heightened abuse by local authorities because of the human rights report, you should maintain close contact with the U.S. embassy at the time of the release. As described in the rest of this guide, the U.S. embassy has additional diplomatic tools that it can use to respond to human rights threats, and embassy officials are even more likely to deploy those tools if you are targeted because of your association with the embassy.

A sample one-page human rights summary for an embassy is included in the Appendix B as an example.



Tips for Human Rights Report Submissions

- *Timing is important: Make contact with the U.S. embassy throughout the year, but be sure to reach out no later than in July, August, or September, when officials are starting to write the annual human rights report.*
- *Bring copies of newspaper articles, reports, or other evidence to make it easier for the embassy to cite the cases you raise.*
- *Read the prior years' reports for your country and think about how they could be improved before you connect with the human rights officer.*
- *Think carefully and prepare a short summary of how you think the embassy should characterize "LGBTQI+ trends" over the past year.*
- *Reflect on whether the names or other relevant details of particular cases should remain confidential to protect those who have been targeted or those who have collected the information. Be very clear with all embassy personnel about the risks involved and any need to keep information confidential.*
- *Prepare for the release of the report. How will you use it to leverage your own work?*
- *Prepare for any potential backlash and maintain contact with the embassy around the release of the report in March or April.*
- *See a sample ["Backgrounder for Human Rights Officer" in Appendix B.](#)*



Tips for Religious Freedom Report Submissions

- *Submit any religious freedom information at the same time you submit general human rights background (see above).*
- *Identify instances in which LGBTQI+-affirming religious institutions or LGBTQI+ congregations have been targeted, discriminated against, or limited in their ability to practice their faith. Have churches, synagogues, mosques, or temples been targeted for vandalism or worse? Have worship services been disrupted or worshipers attacked? Have building permits, operational licenses, tax certificates, or other necessary regulatory documents been denied on account of your LGBTQI+-affirming religious beliefs?*
- *Have existing religious laws been used to target you or your faith community? Please be very explicit in explaining the laws and the ways in which they are used to limit your human rights and religious liberties.*

The U.S. Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons

The United States created the position of a Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons in 2015, and career diplomat Randy Berry was first appointed to fill the role. The Special Envoy is a key leadership position at the State Department. The position went vacant throughout the Trump Administration. In September 2021, the State Department welcomed Jessica Stern, a respected leader in the global movement for LGBTQI+ equality, as the second U.S. Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons.

In this role, the Special Envoy engages the State Department, interagency, civil society, private sector, foreign governments, and academia to conduct listening sessions and engage in strategic dialogue on the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons. This includes discussions with U.S. government colleagues across the State Department and at U.S. embassies around the globe, civil society leaders, like-minded peers, LGBTQI+ activists, and government interlocutors on how to increase support for LGBTQI+ persons and movements globally. The Special Envoy's office also collects and analyzes data from embassies and civil society experts to update the annual Human Rights Reports as well as the annual Interagency Report on implementing President Biden's 2021 memorandum to advance the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world.



How to Engage with the Special Envoy's Office

Request Meetings

Activists can request to meet with the Special Envoy when they are visiting Washington or when the Special Envoy is traveling abroad. These meetings could be used to update the Special Envoy on situations on the ground, raise concerns, or encourage new partnerships.

Update the Envoy's Office Regularly

To keep the Special Envoy updated on critical LGBTQI+ issues, activists can send updates to the Special Envoy's office through partners or directly to other staff members in the office. To avoid overwhelming the office with too many updates, it is advisable to send only critical updates requiring high-level attention and urgency. Activists can also send updates in an abridged version or through official communications like organizational newsletters. The current U.S. Special Envoy, Jessica Stern, can be addressed as "SE Stern" in short form and accepts all pronouns. To email the office of the Special Envoy, you may use [Special Envoy LGBTQI@state.gov](mailto:Special_Envoy_LGBTQI@state.gov).

Responding to Concerns: Diplomatic D marches and Private Diplomacy

U.S. embassy representatives regularly engage in dialogue with host government officials on a variety of issues, including human rights concerns. This dialogue may be elevated when troubling individual cases or other unique incidents occur that prompt the State Department in Washington to issue a “d marche.” A d marche is a formal diplomatic statement from the U.S. government that the U.S. embassy delivers to the host government to raise a particular issue or other strong concern. For example, if a local human rights defender, including one from the LGBTQI+ community, is detained or killed, a d marche might result. Since the instruction comes from Washington, it carries a stronger diplomatic message, and it often provides the local U.S. embassy with additional weight to help convince host government authorities that the issue has the potential to impact bilateral relations in a way that the host government may not have previously recognized.

In many LGBTQI+ cases, however, quiet diplomatic engagement (rather than a d marche) may actually be the most effective form of diplomacy. As with other human rights concerns, once an LGBTQI+-related issue becomes a “public” issue between the United States and another country, local authorities often default to claims that the United States is trying to impose a “western agenda” in opposition to local custom or religion. Public diplomacy can deteriorate into allegations of improper interference, and when it relates to LGBTQI+ human rights concerns, often may be met with accusations of “neocolonial” aggression. If quiet diplomacy doesn’t work, public diplomacy may be necessary. But attempts at quiet diplomacy are almost always an essential first step – and often the most successful tool that any embassy has.

If the local U.S. embassy – or the State Department in Washington – has not raised an issue publicly, don’t assume that U.S. government officials are not engaged. You should contact the political section at the local U.S. embassy to find out if any engagement has occurred and to offer any advice you might have about how to frame the issue or motivate your government in its response. But you also should recognize that in order to respect the behind-the-scenes impact of quiet diplomacy, the U.S. embassy may not be able to provide you with any details of its contacts with your government at this stage of the diplomatic process – or indeed, even confirm that there have been contacts on the matter. (See Chapter 4 of the guide on how to match your specific issues to the correct offices at the U.S. embassy, along with tips about how to make contact with those offices.)

[For more information, read Chapter 4.](#)



Advocating for Same-Sex Marriage Equality

In many countries that continue to criminalize same-sex relationships, full marriage equality may seem far off, and it may not be a priority for the local community. But the fight for same-sex marriage equality is quickly gaining ground in many regions, with notable recent victories in countries from Taiwan to Chile to Cuba and across six continents. In June 2022, the U.S. State Department issued new guidance to U.S. embassies encouraging support for local marriage equality movements in countries where activists are advocating for these protections. This policy clarification is grounded in President Biden's February 2021 memorandum on global LGBTQI+ human rights and replaces an earlier "neutrality" policy that prohibited U.S. embassies from weighing in on same-sex partnership debates.



Freedom to Marry Global is a U.S.-based group with useful resources to support advocates engaged in marriage campaigns, and they have been invited by several U.S. embassies to speak with or offer support to local movements.

Quiet Diplomacy vs. Public Diplomacy: From a Marketplace of Ideas to a War of Words

Most engagement by U.S. government officials with foreign government officials — particularly on sensitive matters — happens in private and is not reported in the media or otherwise. When asking for engagement on particular issues, it is important that you differentiate whether you are asking for quiet or public diplomacy. While “quiet” diplomacy means that you may not know the exact level or specifics of the engagement between U.S. government officials and your government’s officials, you can still follow up and ask to know about any outcomes of such diplomatic efforts.

When the U.S. embassy does go “public” with its grievances over a particular case, pattern of violence, or a new or newly proposed law, it may do so by issuing a press release or by having the spokesperson or other relevant embassy officials speak with the press. The embassy will have thought carefully about how and when to go public, as public diplomacy carries a higher potential risk of damage to the bilateral relationship. Still, it is often important to have the U.S. government on record, ideally in coordination with embassies from other like-minded governments, in opposition or alarm, even if that may limit the likelihood of a quietly negotiated resolution.

Sometimes a public message also can be delivered by other senior U.S. government officials who may be visiting the country from the State Department in Washington or by the ambassador at a local event in the country. This helps elevate the message. You might want to discuss this possibility with your embassy contacts if you know a visit is upcoming.

Another option is to ask the U.S. embassy to consider issuing a statement in coordination with other like-minded embassies or through the [Equal Rights Coalition \(ERC\)](#), which is an inter-governmental coalition of more than 40 LGBTQI+-supportive governments. To date, the ERC has issued [statements](#) condemning LGBTQI+-related human rights concerns in Chechnya, Brunei, and several other regions or countries. The Equal Rights Coalition also has issued a number of positive statements that seek, collectively, to congratulate and encourage countries for positive LGBTQI+ positions, including the decision decriminalizing same-sex intimacy under Article 377 in India.

Finally, the U.S. embassy also might sponsor a public event, such as hosting a human rights forum or inviting a guest speaker to make public remarks at an embassy event. This can make a very strong point without necessarily issuing a formal embassy statement, and it might reserve some additional time and space for quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy. This approach also may have the added advantage of elevating local voices and speakers, thereby avoiding claims that the U.S. is imposing a “homosexual agenda,” as is so often charged to be the case in discussions about LGBTQI+-related concerns. The key is to think

creatively and to discuss a broad range of public options with your embassy contacts. They alone will make the final decision, but your input is essential.

Embassy- and consulate-hosted events, including but not limited to annual receptions to celebrate the July 4th Independence Day holiday in the United States, may provide additional opportunities to elevate LGBTQI+ voices and advocates. By being included at a July 4th celebration or other event at the embassy or consulate, LGBTQI+ defenders may have a unique opportunity to mingle with U.S. staff, other “mainstream” human rights defenders, and host government officials. Pride festivals and other similar events also create opportunities for the U.S. embassy to demonstrate support. In recent years, a majority of U.S. embassies have hosted a reception, conference, film festival, or other event to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) on May 17 or during Pride month in June. Many embassies also have issued statements or raised a rainbow flag to celebrate these LGBTQI+-focused celebrations.



Tips for Effective Public Engagement

- *Discuss the merits of public statements with U.S. embassy contacts. Consider the option of a joint statement with other like-minded embassies of the Equal Rights Coalition.*
- *If you think public U.S. embassy engagement would be helpful, recognize that the decision to go public will be made at senior levels within the embassy and that it will involve a variety of considerations. Help your contacts make an effective internal “case” in support of a public engagement strategy.*
- *Help explain any U.S. embassy statements in local languages and help disseminate and contextualize them in the local media, taking care to ensure that the discussion is about human rights and not “U.S. imperialism.”*
- *Think creatively with embassy contacts about opportunities to partner with the U.S. embassy through public events that raise concerns in more thoughtful or constructive ways and that emphasize local voices.*
- *Consider inviting U.S. embassy personnel to participate in Pride or IDAHOBIT events or to sponsor discussions or activities around those celebrations.*
- *After a successful Pride or IDAHOBIT event, help your embassy contacts understand that LGBTQI+ equality requires more than one month of activism. Work together to suggest appropriate follow-up steps that can be spaced throughout the year, perhaps even leading up to a Pride or IDAHOBIT event for the following year.*

Case Study: Uganda's First "Kill the Gays" Bill



Members of the Ugandan parliament introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Act in October 2009. The "Kill the Gays" bill, as it came to be known in the United States, represented one of the most pernicious assaults on LGBTQI+ rights in any country anywhere, with provisions that would have instated the death penalty as punishment for same-sex relationships, while also requiring every Ugandan to turn suspected homosexuals over to the authorities. It was breathtaking in its intolerance. The bill was eventually passed into law but was later overturned on a technicality when it became expedient for the government to do so. Unfortunately, as we finish this revised guide, a similar bill has passed the Ugandan parliament twice and awaits President Museveni's signature.

The initial campaign against the 2009 bill was waged and won by Ugandans for Ugandans. A well-organized civil society coalition requested and marshaled outside pressure. The U.S. embassy, together with President Obama, Secretary Clinton, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and Congressional leaders, were all very public in their opposition. The timing and the calibration of that public diplomacy was important, as was the fact that it was requested and echoed by local activists.

The U.S. embassy began by engaging in quiet diplomacy.

The U.S. Ambassador to Uganda met with President Museveni to outline U.S. concerns with the bill. This was followed by a *démarche* from Washington. The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa also met with the President of Uganda on multiple occasions to express an unequivocal message of opposition, noting that the adoption of the bill would have a significant impact on our bilateral relationship and on U.S. development investments in the country. These private messages eventually were repeated in the public arena.

After confirming with the local NGO coalition opposing the bill that public international pressure would be helpful, both the U.S. embassy in Uganda and the State Department in Washington began to voice public opposition to the bill and note how its passage would impact U.S.-Uganda relations. The U.S. Assistant Secretary for Africa even stated publicly at one point that he had President Museveni's assurance that the bill would not become law. Those public statements were carefully crafted for maximal impact.

As concern about the adoption of the bill continued to grow, U.S. public diplomacy was elevated to the most senior levels of the U.S. government. At a National Prayer Breakfast in Washington in February 2010, President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton both condemned the bill.

(The religious nature of the event also sent an intentional message.) President Obama called it “unconscionable” and “odious.” Secretary Clinton, noting that the Obama administration was “standing up for gays and lesbians,” emphasized that she had called Museveni to express her “strongest concerns” about the law. In this religious context, Clinton also warned that “religion is used as a club to deny the human rights of girls and women, from the Gulf to Africa to Asia, and to discriminate, even advocating the execution of gays and lesbians. Religion is used to enshrine in law intolerance of free expression and peaceful protest.” The U.S. Senate also passed a resolution in April of that year condemning the bill in Uganda and calling on all countries to decriminalize consensual same-sex relations and relationships.

An important lesson from this case study is that Ugandan activists helped direct the timing and the tactics of the international campaign against the bill. They also helped frame the debate within the larger context of a broad deterioration in human rights and democratic governance across the country. Ugandan activists built a coalition website, www.ugandans4rights.org, to help coordinate the struggle against the bill and the larger movement for human rights in the country. In this case, the United States was invited to flex its diplomatic muscle, and working together with local activists and other embassies, U.S. engagement made a difference.

Trial Monitoring

Representatives of the U.S. embassy may choose to send diplomats to observe trials of high-profile activists or other court hearings impacting human rights defenders. Even before a case goes to court, embassy personnel may inquire into the conditions of individuals being held in detention or, in some places, seek to meet individually with those being detained both before and after trial. In Malawi, for example, the U.S. embassy sent observers to monitor the high-profile trial of a young couple accused of violating the country’s criminal prohibitions against homosexuality. Following the 2011 murder of human rights defender David Kato in Uganda, the U.S. embassy sent diplomats to observe the court proceedings against his alleged attacker. The embassy also sent diplomatic representatives to David Kato’s funeral as a show of solidarity and concern.

The presence of U.S. and other foreign diplomats as observers in important court cases may increase media attention and can put the host government on notice that other governments are watching the case and that the outcome could impact bilateral relations. In some cases, it also may encourage court officials to respect fundamental legal standards of due process, since embassy observers may note and publicly denounce obvious due process violations. Finally, since the first days in detention for any human rights defender are empirically the most dangerous, with most torture and many deaths in detention occurring in those first days, diplomats may serve as credible witnesses to the physical condition of the defendant during an initial court appearance.

At the same time, there may be strategic reasons to discourage diplomats from attending trials. The presence of U.S. and other (likely European) diplomats could reinforce false narratives suggesting that LGBTQI+ issues are “western values” designed to displace “traditional values” or undermine “traditional families.” And in many cases, behind-the-scenes advocacy around particular cases may be more effective than a public show of support that pushes a government into a more defensive posture. Local advocates must lead the decision-making and should offer guidance to U.S. and other embassies regarding important or high-profile LGBTQI+ cases.



Tips for Effective Trial Monitoring

- *If you think it will be helpful, request that the U.S. embassy send trial monitors to court hearings that have significant human rights implications.*
- *Advise the U.S. embassy if you believe that diplomats should not monitor a trial or if you believe that behind-the-scenes diplomacy would be more effective.*
- *Consider whether embassy personnel should ask the host government to clarify the location or conditions of an individual’s detention. Because of the extreme vulnerability of LGBTQI+ individuals in prison, ongoing post-conviction inquiries or visits by embassy personnel can be important.*
- *Provide detailed information about the case, as the U.S. embassy is more likely to take action if it has full information and understands the context.*
- *Help ensure that embassy observers understand the facts. If possible, offer to have a lawyer brief the observers or sit with them during the trial to explain the procedure and legal issues.*
- *Provide messaging guidance to trial monitors on what you would like them to say — or not say — if asked about a trial by local or international media.*
- *Consider issuing a press release indicating that U.S. embassy officials have been invited to observe the trial and calling on court officials to respect the fundamental due process rights of the defendants.*
- *Consider additional opportunities to increase media attention and to publicize any findings or statements that U.S. embassy observers might put forward.*

Global Health Diplomacy

The U.S. government engages in “global health diplomacy” through both the State Department and the Office of Global Affairs (OGA) at the Department of Health and Human Services. OGA defines global health diplomacy as “the intersection of public health and foreign affairs – we foster critical relationships with multilateral organizations, foreign governments, and ministries of health, and represent the United States in key global discussions and negotiations to protect and promote health worldwide.”

There are opportunities to work with embassy staff to educate and prioritize LGBTQI+ health issues in processes at the World Health Organization (WHO) and at governmental levels, and to make sure LGBTQI+ communities and individuals are consulted and included in development and humanitarian health responses. In many countries, the most significant opportunity is to engage in the HIV/AIDS context with PEPFAR (the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) at the country and global levels to influence PEPFAR policy, including how PEPFAR spends its significant funds that are supposed to support the health of at-risk populations (known in PEPFAR terms as “key populations”), including men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender persons, and sex workers. Much of this advocacy can be directed toward the Country Operating Plan (COP) and Regional Operating Plan (ROP) process, where LGBTQI+ groups have made substantial gains in the last decade. If you are interested in engaging with COP advocacy, you can connect with your country’s key populations consortium (if there is one) or with Council member organizations HealthGAP (which organizes PEPFARWatch) and MPACT Global Action. You will find additional information about PEPFAR in Chapter 3.

Emergency Support: Sanctuary and Flight

In an emergency situation, particularly when human rights defenders known to the U.S. embassy have a credible fear of imminent arrest or death because of their activism or association with the embassy, there are some limited protection mechanisms that U.S. embassies may activate. First, and perhaps most obvious, the U.S. embassy may turn again to private or public diplomacy to elevate the stakes and seek immediate protection. In addition, LGBTQI+ individuals who have been injured or whose security or liberty is at risk because of their work as LGBTQI+ human rights defenders may seek limited emergency support from the U.S. government through the Dignity for All: LGBTI Assistance Program hosted by Freedom House. Such support can include a temporary leave from the country or internal relocation within the country in order for tensions to dissipate.

For more information, see <https://www.dignitylgbti.org/>

Council member Rainbow Railroad provides limited emergency support to at-risk LGBTQI+ people (both human rights defenders and others not meeting that definition), including in-country support, information, referrals, and emergency travel support, as well as small grants to grassroots partners.

For more information, see <https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/about#how>

One sad reality of human rights work is that many human rights defenders are forced into exile at some point because of their work. Official refugee status is governed by a human rights treaty that the United States applies in making all of its refugee support decisions. To qualify under the 1951 Refugee Convention, an individual fleeing persecution must have “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” The State Department and the United Nations’ refugee agency both recognize that individuals who fear persecution because of their LGBTQI+ identity or their work in support of LGBTQI+ rights qualify as “Convention refugees” under this definition. The 1951 Convention, however, also requires that individuals must be outside of their country of nationality, so refugee protection depends on an individual’s ability to cross a border to get to another country.

In extreme cases, U.S. embassies may help facilitate this flight into exile and may then help expedite the years’ long process by which refugees are interviewed for official refugee status, usually by U.N. staff, and then permanently resettled, often to a welcoming country if the country of first refuge is unable or unwilling to offer protection. Under emergency conditions, U.S. embassies may directly refer individuals as Priority 1 (P-1) cases to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) based on the individual’s compelling protection needs. A U.S. ambassador may make a P-1 referral for persons still in their country of origin if Departments of State and Homeland Security concur.

The refugee process is long and difficult and should never be entered into without this understanding. But it is an essential, and often final, protection option for those facing threats for their LGBTQI+ identity. For additional information on this complex process, and for advice on how to request assistance from U.S. or other embassies to seek refugee protection, contact the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) at www.refugeerights.org or Rainbow Railroad at www.rainbowrailroad.org. You may also consult the UN “[Guidance Note on Refugee Claims Relating to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#).”

2

How to Frame Your Requests to U.S. Embassies

All U.S. embassies are tasked with reporting on local human rights trends, and many U.S. embassies have robust programs to support local efforts aimed at improving the human rights landscape. As such, it is advisable to focus any requests to U.S. embassies in the language of human rights and democracy, referencing internationally recognized human rights principles and democratic norms. A good starting point for this can be found in the Yogyakarta Principles. In 2006, international human rights experts met in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to draft a set of principles that apply binding international human rights standards to issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. The principles were updated in 2017 and can be accessed at a www.yogyakartaprinciples.org.

In addition to framing your requests or written submissions to U.S. embassies in human rights terms, it may be useful to understand how U.S. officials think of their political and financial investments in human rights and democracy, including the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and other minority communities in any country. While these human rights concerns should always be rooted in principles, they also are often understood in the context of pragmatic long-term democratic, national security, and economic interests in fostering stable countries and partnerships abroad. Below you will find some broader talking points that reflect the many additional interests that motivate U.S. officials to support LGBTQI+ rights in any country.

Fundamental Human Rights

The rights of all individuals to be free from violence and discrimination and to live with dignity and respect is central to U.S. human rights policy and the modern human rights system. A core appeal based on fundamental human rights should be at the root of any request for support. This should directly challenge the notion that the rights of LGBTQI+ persons are “special rights” – there are no special “LGBTQI+ rights”; there are only fundamental human rights for all people.

Human Rights and National Security

Countries that respect the rights of minorities understand their commitment to democracy and make strong diplomatic and economic partners; countries that devalue or persecute their minorities are more likely to be unstable and often dangerous in all respects. This is often referred to as the “canary in the coal mine” argument, because LGBTQI+ individuals and religious minorities are among the most violently persecuted minorities in many countries and therefore the first to be targeted. Dedicated support can lift all minority communities and reduce conflict.

Democracy Promotion and Protection

President Biden continues to emphasize democracy promotion and protection as a signature focus of his administration – and as an urgent priority in a world marked by growing authoritarianism and anti-gender activism. Indeed, President Biden often comments that democracy itself cannot thrive unless the human rights of all people are protected and their democratic participation is safeguarded. In this context, advocates should consider framing the rights of LGBTQI+ persons as a matter of full democratic citizenship and as essential to full participation in the democratic and economic life of their country. It may be useful, for example, to discuss efforts to promote legal gender identity recognition as a citizenship right that allows transgender persons to vote and to access government services and opportunities safely. In Africa, advocates may leverage the current U.S. government push to promote democracy across the continent by engaging with African governments as partners who will benefit from adherence to democratic principles and participatory government. In all cases, advocacy groups should tap into the heightened interest of the Biden administration to connect the promotion of human rights with expanding democratic and economic opportunities.

Rule of Law

Commitment to the rule of law is key to democratization and human rights goals, including those most directly relevant to LGBTQI+ populations. Priority should be given to programs and funding that strengthens legal protections for marginalized populations, including LGBTQI+ individuals, who often lack judicial standing and public voice. In particular, funding should be expanded for programs that embrace violence reduction efforts, as hate crimes – and in particular, impunity after the fact – may significantly undermine the rule of law.

Health Policy

Sound health policy in any country requires the full inclusion of all vulnerable and marginalized populations, including the LGBTQI+ community. In countries that benefit from PEPFAR, embassies and U.S. global health experts will analyze local obstacles that might impede access to comprehensive health care and treatment programs on a bias-neutral basis. In the same vein, these officials also seek to ensure that all populations have access to comprehensive HIV/AIDS health information, education, and treatment on a bias-neutral basis. PEPFAR in particular seeks to promote evidence-based health strategies and programs, including programs that reduce stigma and promote prevention, care, and treatment for LGBTQI+ populations.

U.S. Efforts to Link Democracy, Human Rights, and LGBTQI+ Citizenship



Recognizing that each U.S. administration adopts slightly different human rights strategies, it is useful to note that the Biden Administration is currently prioritizing the defense of democracy as a cornerstone of both its domestic and international human rights policy. President Biden often emphasizes that inclusive democracies value the democratic, economic, and social contributions of all citizens. Indeed, he notes that democracy itself cannot thrive unless the human rights of all people are protected, and this must include protections for often-marginalized LGBTQI+ individuals. Secretary Blinken, speaking to the U.N. Core Group in September 2022, noted that “all countries, including those of us in the Core Group, have work to do to ensure that LGBTQI+ people have the same rights, the same protections as all other people. Defending these rights is central to the health of our democracies.”

Advancing rights for the protection of LGBTQI+ people is closely correlated to broader democratic dividends, including efforts to address democratic backsliding, fight corruption, and build resilient movements to fight authoritarianism.

Fortunately, these themes parallel the themes and fights of LGBTQI+ movements around the world today. (For other issues that have the attention of the Biden Administration, see [Appendix A](#)).

As part of its focus on democratic renewal, the Biden Administration has hosted two Summits for Democracy, and the Council for Global Equality has given “LGBTQI+ Report Cards” to each of the 110 countries participating in those Summits. The Report Cards, produced in collaboration with F&M Global Barometers, measure the extent to which countries attending the Summit protect the human rights of their LGBTQI+ residents. We also hope they will provide unique opportunities for advocates to knock on the doors of U.S. embassies to discuss their country’s score, as well as to request support from U.S. embassies in local campaigns to improve those scores.

Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

There is a significant framework within U.S. development and humanitarian assistance to address and fund gender programs and trainings. Under the current administration, these are explicitly inclusive of LGBTQI+ communities, organizations, and individuals and should be viewed as an opportunity to engage with the embassy on funding opportunities. This administration has released a [Presidential Memorandum](#) that explicitly states its policy “to support women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights in the United States, as well as globally.” The Memorandum also explicitly removes the United States as a signatory from the anti-LGBTQI+ and anti-abortion Geneva Consensus Declaration that was signed under the previous administration.

Democratic and Developmental Assistance

The critical link between diplomatic efforts to support foreign civil society as drivers of democracy on one hand and parallel developmental assistance programs on the other should be strengthened by ensuring that LGBTQI+ minority populations are included in the full range of human rights, health, economic empowerment, humanitarian, and development assistance policies that the U.S. carries out abroad. To help frame LGBTQI+ issues and requests in economic development terms, we urge you to consult a publication by [RSFL](#), a leading Swedish LGBTQI+ group, called [FOR ALL: The Sustainable Development Goals and LGBTI People](#). It builds on the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the United Nations adopted in 2015. As noted in the RSFL guide, “the goals offer an opportunity for LGBTQI+ advocates to seek inclusion in the international development agenda and in national policies and programs.” This should apply equally to all U.S.-funded development programs.

Economic Prosperity

It is in any country’s long-term economic interests to promote vibrant and inclusive economies abroad – and economies that can, in turn, support a broader trade and commercial relationship with the United States and other countries. The full economic inclusion of all productive individuals, including LGBTQI+ and other minority workers, is absolutely crucial to economic prosperity. World Bank research has underscored that discrimination, exclusion, and criminalization of LGBTQI+ people carries a measurable and detrimental impact on a country’s economy.

Corporate Responsibility

U.S. embassies also host the U.S. Commerce Department’s Foreign Commercial Service, which works closely with American Chambers of Commerce abroad. These officials should be encouraged to dialogue with host governments on the need to temper or change LGBTQI+-hostile laws and climates to facilitate both corporate workforce assignments and broader commercial relationships. Embassies also should be encouraged to partner actively with global U.S. companies to accord equal employment opportunities, equal access to procurement and business opportunities, and protections for LGBTQI+ and other

marginalized populations abroad. For more information on how to enlist corporations in the struggle for LGBTQI+ equality, we suggest consulting Open For Business's report, [Channels of Influence: How Companies Can Promote LGBT+-Inclusive Societies.](#)

3

How Do U.S. Embassies Offer Assistance?

An obvious question for any activist is this: How can I obtain funding from the U.S. embassy or the U.S. government to support our work? The reality is that U.S. embassy budgets have been slashed in recent years, and even major funding through the U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID) and the U.S. global HIV/AIDS program (the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or "PEPFAR") is in decline. However, the Biden Administration has promised and is showing commitment to increasing support to the LGBTQI+ community with increased funding through USAID, State Department, and other partners. There also are some funding opportunities that you may be able to access through U.S. embassies or American NGOs that partner with U.S. embassies. This chapter will highlight some of those opportunities.

Technical Support

Before considering funding mechanisms, consider in-kind or technical support that the embassy might be able to provide. In tight economic times and due to complex bureaucratic arrangements, it may be easier to persuade a U.S. embassy to contribute technical support rather than direct funding. Embassy personnel often can lend new perspectives and unexpected technical expertise to your domestic advocacy work.

U.S. embassies have a variety of experts with unique skills and capacities that could be helpful to LGBTQI+ advocacy work. U.S. embassies also have access to funds that allow the embassy to bring in artists, speakers, or technical experts from the United States to share American perspectives and offer technical support from U.S. institutions. A good example of this comes from the efforts of the U.S. embassy in Honduras in 2011, which arranged for hate crime investigators to come to Honduras to help set up a special unit to investigate a pattern of murders targeting the LGBTQI+ community. The U.S. Justice Department also has very useful experience in tracking and prosecuting hate crimes committed on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity that could be adapted to other country and legal contexts. A more entertaining example of this exchange possibility comes from the U.S. embassy in Italy, where the U.S. Ambassador played a central role in arranging a performance and discussion by Lady Gaga at the 2011 EuroPride celebration in Rome.

In addition, since U.S. embassies have become much more open and tolerant workplaces for LGBTQI+ Americans in recent years, many U.S. embassies now have openly LGBTQI+ employees within the embassy. While LGBTQI+-inclusive human rights work is the responsibility of the entire U.S. embassy family, not just LGBTQI+ staff, LGBTQI+ staff

may nonetheless be more willing to volunteer their time or knowledge outside of their regular responsibilities to help advance the work of your NGO, particularly in the evenings or on weekends.

Glifaa: LGBTQIA+ Pride in Foreign Affairs Agencies is the LGBTQI+ employee group for the State Department and other U.S. foreign affairs agencies. If you email officials listed on the glifaa site, they may be able to put you in contact with LGBTQI+ employees at your local U.S. embassy who might be interested in meeting or even volunteering with your organization.

Case Study: Investigating LGBTQI+ Killings in Honduras



In a White House statement in January 2011, then-President Obama noted an alarming pattern of murders of members of the LGBTQI+ community in Honduras. The statement called on the Government of Honduras to “investigate these killings and hold the perpetrators accountable.” The U.S. embassy in Honduras took this human rights concern seriously and worked diligently to shine a spotlight on these targeted LGBTQI+ killings. In particular, the embassy worked closely with the Government of Honduras to set up a special victim’s unit to investigate and prosecute LGBTQI+ hate crimes. The embassy arranged for a prosecutor and an expert detective from the United States to travel to Honduras to help establish the unit. The embassy also sponsored a visit to the country by a U.S. activist who works to reduce violence in LGBTQI+ immigrant communities in the United States. He spent a week with local NGOs and raised the profile of the issue in the media with guest appearances on several national television programs.

Funding Mechanisms

Global Equality Fund

Managed by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), The Global Equality Fund (GEF) provides critical resources to civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights defenders, including those working to increase the visibility and empowerment of queer women, transgender, and other gender diverse people, intersex people, and members of other marginalized LGBTQI+ communities, while advancing and protecting the fundamental principle of human rights for all. In over 100 countries worldwide, the GEF provides emergency assistance to individuals and organizations under threat or attack, small grants for grassroots CSOs, and human rights programming grants to meet the needs of LGBTQI+ communities with long-term, targeted support.

DRL at the State Department manages the GEF with the support and partnership of a strong coalition of like-minded governments, businesses, and foundations dedicated to amplifying local LGBTQI+ voices and movements to catalyze positive change.

How the Global Equality Fund Provides Support

Support for Civil Society

Leveraging the global reach of GEF partners' embassies and consulates worldwide, local CSOs receive small grants to support local community-based LGBTQI+ organizations.

Local Embassy Funds

Some embassies have small grant programs that may occasionally support LGBTQI+ efforts, particularly around public awareness programs. These funds are extremely limited, however, so be sure to check with your local embassy contact as to availability.

Equal Rights in Action Fund

The ERA Fund is one of the GEF's small grants programs. It is implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in coordination with U.S. embassies and provides grants of up to \$25,000 to local organizations around the world working to promote and defend the human rights of LGBTQI+ communities.

In addition to financial resources, NDI provides ongoing technical assistance based on the particular needs and priorities of each grantee. Assistance provided through the ERA Fund is dedicated to achieving:

- Safe and Secure Environments
- Political Participation
- Empowered & Inclusive Movements & Organizations

Organizations may apply to the ERA Fund only by invitation. In order to receive an invitation, organizations must be nominated by staff at local U.S. embassies. For LGBTQI+ grantmaking, local embassies of countries that participate in the GEF may also nominate organizations. NDI is not able to accept applications from organizations that were not nominated by local embassies. NDI works with the State Department to determine a list of eligible countries for each round of grantmaking. There is typically one round of grantmaking to LGBTQI+ organizations per year, with a call for embassy nominations around September. Each embassy will organize its own process for determining how to select organizations to be nominated. Interested organizations are encouraged to check the ERA Fund website at the link above for updates on upcoming rounds of grantmaking.

Emergency Assistance

Dignity for All, the GEF's rapid-response mechanism, provides emergency and preventive assistance support to human rights defenders and CSOs under threat or attack due to their human rights work on behalf of LGBTQI+ communities. Dignity offers three short-term mechanisms to support LGBTQI+ movements: rapid-response financial assistance for individuals and CSOs under threat for their human rights work; project funding to CSOs/groups for time-sensitive initiatives; and safety and security trainings, including well-being and digital security. Support includes, but is not limited to:

- Medical expenses
- Legal representation
- Prison visits
- Trial monitoring
- Temporary relocation
- Dependent support
- Security and equipment replacement
- Other types of urgent expenses

Human Rights Programming

Long-term technical assistance addresses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by LGBTQI+ communities. Such assistance also helps build the capacity of local and national CSOs dedicated to advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

In all regions of the world, the GEF supports program activities focused on the key themes identified in its strategic framework. Activities include legal empowerment trainings, capacity building support, strategic litigation, dialogues with local government officials and key regional and multilateral stakeholders, local and international advocacy campaigns, documentation of rights violations, and digital and physical security trainings.

Local U.S. Embassy Funding

As already noted, U.S. embassies are often willing to participate in or help support local Pride events, IDAHOBIT celebrations, local LGBTQI+ film festivals, or relevant human rights conferences. Many U.S. embassies have hosted receptions to commemorate Pride month in June and to honor LGBTQI+ activists. This should be considered carefully, however. There was, for instance, significant local backlash from a Pride reception at the U.S. embassy in Pakistan in 2011. If you request U.S. embassy support, be sure to discuss with your embassy contacts how open or public you want that support to be.

Case Study: Pride Events Supported by U.S. Embassies

- *Many U.S. embassies around the world have raised the Pride or Progress Flag in commemoration of the month — hopefully with local sensitivities in mind.*
- *Embassies have hosted public panels with transgender activists, intersex activists, and LGBTQI+ persons from various faith or belief backgrounds.*
- *In 2021, DRL created social media toolkits for Pride month that were shared with all embassies and consulates. These toolkits had graphics and messages affirming U.S. support for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons and were downloaded and used with a global reach.*
- *State Department’s social media platforms documented and promoted numerous noteworthy and historic LGBTQI+ events around the world.*
- *Activists in Zimbabwe invited the deputy chief of mission to a special live interview for Pride, where they shared their insights on challenges the LGBTQI+ community faces, their successes to celebrate, and their goals for enshrining LGBTQI+ rights in law.*
- *The U.S. Embassy in Slovakia supported the week-long Kosice Pride festival in the second largest city in the country.*
- *The U.S. Embassy in Stockholm signed on to the Common Declaration in Support of Stockholm Pride, along with 25 other foreign missions in Sweden. The Declaration kicked off the embassy’s messaging campaign in support of Stockholm Pride and World Pride in Copenhagen and Malmö.*
- *In Serbia, the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade participated in a U.N.-led campaign in celebration of Pride to highlight international support for LGBTQI+ equality in Serbia.*
- *The U.S. Embassy in Uganda endorsed and sent messages of solidarity to the organizers of Uganda Pride.*

Outside of support for Pride events, there are other ways that advocates may seek support from U.S. embassies to organize or engage in their activities. Below are some suggestions based on past activities supported by U.S. embassies around the world.

Possible Embassy or Consulate Requests

- *Ask the U.S. embassy to arrange for a private meeting between LGBTQI+ leaders and government or religious authorities.*
- *Ask the embassy to send representatives or speakers to your meetings or conferences.*
- *Ask the embassy to organize film screenings at the embassy or invite embassy staff to film screenings organized by the community.*
- *Ask the embassy to help organize trainings for security agencies or general trainings on rule of law and inclusion.*
- *Ask the embassy to support English-language courses organized for the local community.*

Examples of Other Activities and Projects Supported by U.S. Embassies Around the World

In North Macedonia, the U.S. Embassy in Skopje provided a small grant to an LGBTQI+ organization to host a series of workshops and discussions with the LGBTQI+ community, allies, and state institutions on recognizing and mitigating discrimination.

The U.S. Embassy in the Philippines partnered with local organizations to train and mentor emerging LGBTQI+ leaders, raise awareness of and combat discrimination toward LGBTQI+ populations, and call attention to domestic violence and gender-based violence.

The Public Affairs Section in Lebanon awarded a grant to promote the integration and participation of LGBTQI+ persons in Lebanon in the democratic process. The program also provided resources for the LGBTQI+ community to expand understanding of itself as a “distinct and powerful community” by creating the first gender and sexuality library in Lebanon.

The U.S. embassy in Chile supported the creation of the first nationwide LGBTQI+ virtual helpline. Due to an increasing number of individuals experiencing depression as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the hotline received a 250 percent increase in LGBTQI+ youth reaching out for help.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

As the primary U.S. government agency for international development and humanitarian assistance, USAID leads efforts to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance, and help people progress beyond emergency assistance. The agency also provides assistance to countries recovering from disaster, trying to alleviate poverty, and emerging from periods of conflict. USAID undertakes broad development and foreign assistance activities while aiming to expand stable, free societies, create markets and trade

partners for the United States, and foster good will abroad. USAID is active in about 80 developing countries around the world ([view where USAID works](#)).

In Washington, the USAID Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI) Inclusive Development Hub includes the LGBTQI+ portfolio, led by Senior LGBTQI+ Coordinator Jay Gilliam. The [LGBTQI+ portfolio](#) seeks to ensure that LGBTQI+-led organizations, networks, and individuals have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the full range of USAID development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian assistance programs, and to advance the human rights and social inclusion of all LGBTQI+ people. In 2014, USAID released the [LGBT Vision for Action](#), which reflects USAID's commitment to protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ people in all programming. View more information about the ways that USAID has supported LGBTQI+ people in this [fact sheet](#) and [two-pager](#).

Understanding USAID Funding and Partnership Opportunities

USAID grants are normally large, and because of the complex accounting requirements, they are often awarded to large international NGOs with the capacity to manage multi-million-dollar budgets. These large international NGOs are generally required to ensure that the money flows down in smaller increments to local NGOs, often through sub-grants.

USAID has two main ways to get resources to LGBTQI+ communities: first, via the programs managed by USAID country missions on thematic development priorities, as articulated in the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). These include priorities such as education; resilience; agriculture; food security; nutrition; water security; sanitation and hygiene; market system development; job training and skills building; democracy, human rights, governance and justice reform; media and civil society capacity building; global health, including menstrual health and hygiene; parental health, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases; conflict prevention and countering violent extremism; humanitarian assistance; disaster risk reduction; and emergency relief. Based on priorities outlined in the CDCS, USAID missions determine the partners for effective programming, and USAID leadership has articulated goals for working with local partners. The second way USAID resources LGBTQI+ communities is through Washington-managed public-private partnerships that leverage private funding and utilize LGBTQI+-led intermediary organizations with deep connections to grassroots, national, regional, and global advocacy organizations.

Why Would You Contact USAID?

- To understand what current USAID programs, partnerships, and other opportunities exist to strengthen partnerships with LGBTQI+-led CSOs on development programs.
- To convey your priorities and human development needs to ensure they are being addressed by USAID programs.

How to Contact USAID

In addition to Washington’s LGBTQI+ portfolio team, each USAID country mission or office has a staff LGBTQI+ focal point.

- Email lgbtqi@usaid.gov to be connected with the Washington LGBTQI+ team, who can connect you with the USAID country LGBTQI+ focal point and alert you about opportunities for partnerships.
- Ask your contact(s) in the U.S. Embassy to introduce you to staff at the USAID mission or country office so that you can better understand the development and humanitarian assistance programs in your country.

Beneficiary Nondiscrimination Protections

In 2016, USAID updated its policy to mandate nondiscrimination protections in the implementation of all USAID programs. This means that, under existing USAID policy, Bureaus/Missions and Operating Units must not discriminate against any beneficiary or potential beneficiary, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. USAID’s workforce and implementing partners must treat every allegation of discrimination seriously and pursue appropriate action to resolve it; to this end, USAID is developing an Accountability Mechanism to receive and resolve complaints by individuals or groups who have experienced economic, environmental, or social harm caused by a USAID project or activity.

Reporting Discrimination in USAID Programming



You can register reports of LGBTQI+ discrimination to the appropriate USAID official or to the USAID Inspector General. You can also contact the Washington LGBTQI+ team at lgbtqi@usaid.gov. Please also notify the Council at info@globalequality.org

President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)

PEPFAR represents the historic effort of the United States to respond to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and is the largest international investment ever made by any country to combat a single disease. In 2022 alone, the U.S. Congress authorized \$5.4 billion USD for bilateral global HIV/AIDS programming through PEPFAR.

While PEPFAR is a single effort directed by the Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator of United States Government Activities to Combat HIV/AIDS Globally and a team from the Department of State (S/GAC), it is actually implemented by eight different U.S. agencies: Department of State, USAID, Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, Department of Labor, Department of Treasury, Peace Corps, and several divisions of

the Department of Health and Human Services, including Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Institutes of Health, Office of Global Affairs, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

At a country level, working with or receiving funds from PEPFAR is often synonymous with USAID or CDC, but there are often also smaller projects from the other agencies or U.S. embassies themselves, and the roles of the other agencies can be very important in navigating programs and opportunities. PEPFAR operates in over 50 countries and program planning is done annually through a Country Operating Plan (COP) or Regional Operating Plan (ROP) process.

PEPFAR has made policy and financial commitments to respond to key populations in the HIV epidemic, including the unique needs of trans women, gay and bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM). While the execution of these commitments can fall short, it does provide significant opportunity for engagement with the program in your country. There are two main ways to work with PEPFAR, and many organizations do some combination of both. One is to receive PEPFAR money either as a prime partner (directly from the U.S. government) or as a subprime partner (through large implementers as a partner on one piece of a larger project). Most key populations and LGBTQI+ groups are sub-partners and often find their relationships and communication go through the prime partner rather than PEPFAR directly. The other way, discussed in more detail in the Global Health Diplomacy section of the first chapter, is to engage with PEPFAR at the country and global levels to influence PEPFAR policy and how it spends its money. Although a vast percentage of funding under PEPFAR goes towards the direct provision of HIV treatment, there should be opportunities for LGBTQI+ groups to work with PEPFAR to foster socially and legally enabling environments for LGBTQI+ people as a component of U.S. global health policy.

If you are in a country with PEPFAR funding, you may want to ask your contact for human rights issues at the U.S. embassy if they could introduce you to PEPFAR-related contacts (who may or may not be located within the USAID team) to discuss whether your organization might be able to benefit from, or participate in, existing PEPFAR programs. This should be considered even if those programs are not primarily LGBTQI+-focused initiatives. One additional consideration for groups considering applying for PEPFAR funding is that it comes with additional restrictions not seen in other U.S. government funds. All foreign organization recipients of PEPFAR funds must sign an “anti-prostitution pledge” embedded in the actual law to certify that they will not “promote or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution or sex trafficking.” While many groups sign the pledge without making substantive changes to their work, it can be a barrier to many human rights, sex worker rights, and LGBTQI+ groups. During some U.S. presidencies, global health money also comes with restrictions around speech, partnerships, medical services, and activities related to abortion, often disrupting work and contracts far outside

an expected scope. Embassies can be very reluctant to discuss these restrictions or their implications, even during U.S. administrations friendly to LGBTQI+ rights



If you have specific questions on funding restrictions, please contact info@globalequality.org for more advice and review this useful activist guide for engaging PEPFAR at country level.

International Visitor Programs

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) is the State Department's professional exchange program that builds mutual understanding between the United States and other nations through carefully designed short-term visits to the United States for current and emerging leaders, including NGO leaders. These visits both reflect the professional interests of the international visitors and support the foreign policy goals of the United States. IVLP grants are selected annually by U.S. embassies around the world, so it is important to make your interest in being considered known to political, economic, and public diplomacy officers in the U.S. embassy. When a noted LGBTQI+ activist from Uganda participated in one of these programs, the State Department announced the visit by noting that:



“One of Uganda’s most outspoken and prominent human rights activists . . . is visiting the United States under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State’s International Visitor Leadership Program to focus on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) advocacy. . . . [She] will have discussions with members of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, faith groups, and the media, as well as with local and federal government officials. In turn, she will talk with U.S. interlocutors and broader audiences about the Ugandan human rights situation and challenges faced by members of the LGBTI community.”²



IVLP-On-Demand

There is another program run by the State Department that is designed to provide funding for travel inside of the United States if an advocate is already coming to the United States for other purposes or meetings and has their flights secured from other sources.

²Available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/07/144419.htm>

This can potentially add on a busy additional two weeks of a custom-built, professional exchange to learn and develop skills and generate new ideas with leaders and civil society organizations based in different cities in the United States. There needs to be enough time in advance of such visits to apply and plan such a trip. This add-on program as part of IVLP can be arranged through your embassy or with support from contacts in Washington.

Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI): Mandela Washington Fellowship

The Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) is another initiative of the State Department. It is the United States' signature effort to invest in the next generation of African leaders. It is aimed at educating and creating networking opportunities for young African leaders with activities including the Mandela Washington Fellowship, an initiative that brings participants to study in the United States for six weeks, with follow-up resources, and an in-depth student exchange program. The program also runs regional initiatives across the African continent through the YALI Regional Leadership Centers. Engagements in these centers provide opportunities for online and in-person training and professional development opportunities within three track areas: Business and Entrepreneurship, Civil Society Management, and Public Policy and Management. The Mandela Washington Fellowship selection process is a merit-based open competition with open calls for applications due in the fall of each year.

Fellows can participate at campuses across the continent, with options available for English, French, and Portuguese speakers. The Regional Leadership Center for West Africa is located at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Accra, Ghana, and the Centre Africain d'Etudes Supérieures en Gestion (CESAG), Dakar, Senegal. The Accra Center also operates a satellite campus at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), near Lagos, Nigeria and with a center in Dakar, Senegal for French-speaking West Africans. In East Africa the center is located at Kenyatta University, Nairobi and the Southern African Regional Leadership Center is at University of South Africa (UNISA) School of Business Leadership (SBL), near Pretoria, South Africa, with a satellite campus at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, Mozambique, for Portuguese speakers.

Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award

The Secretary of State's International Women of Courage (IWOC) Award was established to pay tribute to women around the world who have courageously advocated for the rights, equality, and social progress of all citizens – often in the face of great personal adversity and danger. As part of the award activities, recipients are supported to visit the United States to participate in practical training and engagement with peers and officials in Washington and across the country who are invested in their work and vision. The recipients also travel across the United States to participate in specially designed International Visitor Leadership Programs.

Their IVLP visits culminate with a dinner hosted by American Women for International Understanding (AWIU), providing the awardees with special grants to continue their work at home. Nominations for the IWOC award are made through U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide based on the candidates' work being known to the staff. In the past, these awards have included trans women. We encourage people in our community to nominate or self-nominate lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer women to your local embassy or consulate for their extraordinary work on behalf of our communities. To help the embassy staff better understand your nomination, document and provide all the details about the nominee, including links to articles and other items about them and their work online. You can find more information about the award and application process [here](#).

4

How Are Embassies Organized? Whom Should You Contact for What?

The largest U.S. embassies may have hundreds of employees attending to a broad range of diplomatic, economic, and consular affairs. In addition, U.S. diplomats often rotate through foreign posts every two or three years, making it difficult to stay connected to the U.S. embassy when contacts rotate so frequently. Because of this complex organizational structure, it is important to invest in personal relationships with several individual embassy officers. To do so, it helps to understand who your interlocutors should be in various embassy sections and what issues you might raise with each of them.

U.S. Ambassador

Bilateral ambassadors serve as the head of their respective embassies and as the personal representative of the President of the United States. A bilateral ambassador coordinates the work of all other U.S. officials and all U.S. government agencies in an individual country. The ambassador is also an important public figure who regularly attends public events and functions. You may want to invite the ambassador to speak at, or open, an LGBTQI+ conference, Pride event, film festival, or other cultural events. Various ambassadors also have hosted diplomatic receptions for LGBTQI+ activists at the embassy or at their official residences. When the ambassador is not available, the second-most senior embassy official, the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), may step into the ambassador's traditional representational role; in other cases, that role may be delegated to the most substance-appropriate section of the embassy. The ambassador and DCM probably will not be useful primary contacts, as their agendas and schedules do not normally allow them to focus on a single issue. They nonetheless are essential to managing any emergency situation or responding to an escalating pattern of human rights concerns.

Senate Confirmation Hearings for Ambassadors: An Opportunity to Put LGBTQI+ Commitments on Record

U.S. ambassadors are nominated by the President, but they are confirmed for the position by the U.S. Senate. As part of the confirmation process, ambassadorial nominees must face questions posed by U.S. Senators considering their qualifications for the job in a public hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Council often has the opportunity to suggest questions to Senate offices for these confirmation hearings, including questions about the nominee's support for LGBTQI+ human rights issues and ideas about how to advance those rights. With targeted LGBTQI+ questions asked in an open (and recorded) hearing, confirmation hearings can put future U.S. ambassadors on record as supporting outreach to LGBTQI+ communities, and any public commitments they make during the hearing can then be followed up with requests for support once the ambassador takes up post at a U.S. embassy abroad. Please reach out to the Council with suggested confirmation questions as soon as you hear that a new U.S. ambassador has been named to serve in your country.

Human Rights Cases and Reporting

Embassies will have one or more political officers whose job it is to respond to emergency human rights cases and manage human rights reporting. The job of political officers is to monitor a host country's domestic and foreign policies and promote U.S. political interests, including U.S. human rights priorities. One or more of these officers may often be your primary point of contact at the embassy, and a political officer is often the person who is tasked with writing the annual human rights report. You should make an effort to get to know the embassy officer who writes the human rights report, and if that person is not a political officer, you should also make an effort to meet the political officer who covers human rights issues.

Public Events and Media Responses

Most embassies will have one or more public affairs officers whose job is to work closely with the local media to help promote U.S. perspectives and priorities. Public affairs officers may be able to speak to LGBTQI+ issues within the context of the embassy's broader human rights messaging and can work with other embassy personnel to include LGBTQI+ concerns in public events that highlight the U.S. embassy's human rights, economic, or legal reform priorities.

Workplace Equality Issues

A majority of large U.S. corporations now have positive workplace policies aimed at promoting diversity, including LGBTQI+ diversity, within their U.S. offices. As these corporations rotate LGBTQI+ employees into their overseas operations, some have found a need to make the business case to local government officials for equality and diversity in the workplace and may have worked, in some instances, with U.S. embassies to help make that case. Although there is no office within U.S. embassies that has a clear mandate to address workplace equality issues, in some cases embassies may work with local American Chambers of Commerce to raise LGBTQI+ workplace issues with host government officials, as is often done on other business-related issues. We encourage you to engage the economic and/or commercial sections of the local embassy on workplace issues and ask them to find an appropriate way to structure these issues into the broader bilateral trade and economic policy dialogue.

Visa Issues

Consular officers in every embassy issue visas and facilitate travel to the United States for local citizens. Consular officers are required to enforce strict immigration procedures that often make it difficult for young NGO activists (or, indeed, a range of other citizens) with few financial resources to travel to the United States. They must also enforce security checks on visa applications that are necessitated by the realities of terrorism in the post-9/11 security environment. The U.S. visa process is difficult, often intimidating, and many

visa applicants are left feeling frustrated or even humiliated by the types of questions that consular officers are required to ask. These officers are simply following strict protocols for the issuance of visas, which include ensuring that the person will not become a “public charge” after arriving in the United States. As a U.S. organization, the Council sympathizes with the difficulty of this process and the stress it creates for both our NGO colleagues and our State Department associates working at U.S. embassies and consulates. The U.S. visa application process is a difficult process for a difficult world.

For additional guidance on applying for a U.S. visa and the types of documents that you will be required to produce to substantiate your request, see the travel section of the State Department website at: http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html.

Activating the U.S. Government in Multilateral Spaces in Support of Local LGBTQI+ Agendas

Many multilateral institutions, primarily U.N. entities, have made significant strides in enacting policies and implementing programs to protect rights and foster the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people. This engagement and attention by multilateral institutions has led to increased funds and programming with a meaningful impact on LGBTQI+ people. Still, progress has been uneven, and many challenges remain. LGBTQI+ advocates working in these high-level spaces are often overwhelmed and sometimes lack the expertise to engage effectively. Despite these challenges, advocates who choose to engage within the space have many tools and opportunities at their disposal to ensure meaningful outcomes. Some of these opportunities include partnering with other organizations with the right expertise and tools for engagement: for instance, organizations with U.N. accreditations such as Outright International and ILGA can support the participation of local activists at high-level U.N. meetings and help organize side events with significant impact. Similarly, advocates can work with partners like the U.S. government and these international organizations to help elevate their issues and voices.

One example of an effective way to partner with the U.S. government within these high-level spaces is through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. The UPR is a mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Under the UPR, the human rights records of all 193 United Nations member states are reviewed regularly. The UPR is proving to be a valuable tool for enhancing international attention and response to human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). It is also a crucial opportunity for local NGOs to hold their governments accountable for their human rights records in an international forum. Some of the recommendations, informed by contributions from civil society and raised by U.N. member states during past UPR sessions, have focused on decriminalization, ending impunity for killings based on SOGI, punishment for those who mistreat sexual minorities in detention, advancing legislation in

support of sexual orientation and gender identity, and HIV programs and retroviral treatments for sexual minorities. Countries like the United States are open to engagement with civil society and often benefit from guidance on questions to raise and the steps needed to improve the local human rights situation. Advocates also can work closely with the United States to put pressure on their governments over their human rights records, put questions forward on behalf of LGBTQI+ activists in a hostile environment, and support civil society participation within the United Nations. The UPR affords a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the many human rights violations experienced on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. It allows advocates the opportunity to highlight their concerns, strengthen old ties and build new partnerships, foster positive developments, build high-level international support, and make concrete recommendations for change.

By following this [link](#), you can learn more about the UPR process, including how to engage with the process and other relevant information to aid your effectiveness within the space. Outside of the UPR, there also are other different ways to advocate in expansive multilateral spaces to activate U.S. government support and partnership. For example, advocates can reach out to their local embassies and organize meetings with the relevant staff to learn more about how they can encourage the U.S. government to raise their concerns within multilateral spaces, provide recommendations on issues affecting them, and potentially submit questions or topics to be raised by the U.S. government on behalf of the local LGBTQI+ community. Similarly, advocates can inform embassy personnel about their engagements and work within regional human rights spaces like the Organization of American States or the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

5

When Things Go Wrong

The purpose of this guide is to present opportunities to leverage support from U.S. embassies to advance the local movement for LGBTQI+ equality. But what happens when the U.S. embassy or bad actors coming from the United States are part of the problem? This chapter offers some ideas on what to do when things go wrong.

When U.S. Activists Are Spreading Hate

Anti-LGBTQI+ actors and organizations based in the United States often are directly or indirectly responsible for encouraging – and often funding – policies that target the rights of LGBTQI+ persons abroad. As the so-called anti-gender movement strengthens, these activists are growing in power and influence. So, what can you do when U.S. actors are fueling or funding anti-LGBTQI+ policies or other harmful initiatives in your country?

First, bring this to the attention of the U.S. embassy and to our staff at the Council. You should then ask the embassy if it would be willing to speak out directly to counter the harmful voices coming from the United States or fund other programs or speakers to counter those messages. The U.S. government generally cannot limit the ability of U.S. citizens to travel abroad, but it can and should actively counter harmful messages coming from U.S. actors either directly or through surrogates. If the messaging is coming from religious actors, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, who is based in Washington, might be well-positioned to speak out to counter dangerously extremist rhetoric or to lift up LGBTQI+-affirming religious voices to offer a counter-perspective.

You also should consider whether there are any opportunities to prevent those harmful U.S. actors from coming to your country in the first place. Some countries have the ability to deny visas or limit entry into their country for extremists who incite violence through their rhetoric or funding.

Prohibiting U.S. Extremists from Traveling Abroad

U.S. officials and courts generally lack the legal authority to prevent U.S. citizens from traveling abroad, even when they are traveling abroad to incite discrimination or violence. But other countries have taken independent action to prohibit U.S. extremists from entering their country.

In 2016, South Africa banned Steven Anderson, a well-known anti-LGBTQI+ extremist from the United States. He was also deported from neighboring Botswana after local activists started a petition calling for him to be banned from their country as well.

What you can do when American religious extremists visit your country:

- *Document the concern and alert the U.S. Embassy.*
- *Elevate and promote other spokespeople who are voices of tolerance and understanding.*
- *Ask the U.S. ambassador to tweet or otherwise counter the messaging coming from the United States.*
- *If possible, organize a roundtable with local government, religious leaders, and LGBTQI+ leaders where the concerns about these discredited actors can be raised.*
- *Contact TFAM Global. TFAM Global can connect you with faith leaders within the affirming community in the United States and beyond. These leaders can directly challenge the extremists.*

When You Have Lost Touch with Your Contact in the U.S. Embassy

U.S. diplomats generally rotate every two to three years, which is challenging for local activists who cultivate good working relationships with diplomats, only to see them rotate to another post just as the relationship becomes productive. To mitigate this challenge, when your contact is leaving, you should be sure to ask to be introduced to the incoming diplomat who will take over the post. There is not always perfect overlap, but your contact should still be able to help make those introductions possible.

Additionally, you should try to build working relationships with local, non-U.S. citizen staff who work in each U.S. embassy. The local, national staff do not rotate, so they will likely stay much longer, even while the career diplomats and ambassadors come and go. The local staff, called “foreign service nationals,” often serve as a permanent anchor in many embassies and can be extremely helpful in that context.

Finally, if your contacts have gone dry over a prolonged period, do not hesitate to reach out to the Council, and we can help track down a new contact at the embassy as well as a contact in Washington. Remember that every embassy reports back to a desk officer in Washington who also follows your country and local issues on a daily, full-time basis.

When the U.S. Embassy Is Hiding Behind the “Do No Harm” Principle

Even if they do not always get it right, local U.S. embassies are well-versed in the principle of “do no harm.” It’s the guiding rule for U.S. diplomats in this context: don’t do anything to make the situation worse for local LGBTQI+ actors. But sometimes, they hide behind this principle to do nothing. When faced with competing bilateral priorities and complex or outright hostile political attitudes toward LGBTQI+ persons, it is far easier for an embassy to do nothing rather than wading into complex political and cultural debates. And to justify such inaction, the embassy often will point to the “do no harm” principle, especially if the local political discourse already dismisses LGBTQI+ issues as a western or colonial import that stands in conflict with “traditional” values. They also might point to inevitably divergent opinions by local activists on the best way forward to justify their inaction.

The Council firmly believes that “do no harm” must never be interpreted as “do nothing.” And local advocates will always have spirited debates over the best way forward — that is entirely appropriate and healthy, and that happens just as often in the United States. Diversity of strategies should be celebrated; a movement will rarely be fully united behind all actions. The “do no harm” principle may dictate a behind-the-scenes approach to the issues and a quieter approach to local funding, but there is almost always some room to engage. In the face of a do-nothing attitude, there are a few steps that might help move an embassy to action.

You should remind your local embassy contacts that a Presidential Memorandum specifically instructs all embassies and all U.S. foreign affairs agencies “to ensure that United States diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons everywhere.” You might also reach out to other LGBTQI+-supportive local embassies to see if they might approach the U.S. embassy to encourage a more supportive and collaborative posture. Embassies often like to work collectively on LGBTQI+ issues, as collective action provides more political cover, and it is often more effective.

If these efforts do not help, please reach out to us at the Council, and we can help bring your request to officials at the State Department in Washington. At the end of the day, all embassies and ambassadors ultimately take orders from Washington.

When U.S. Policies are Harming Coalitions and Programs

There are restrictions on U.S. funding that set political tones and that impact LGBTQI+ health and rights. While many of these restrictions are not in place during the current Biden Administration, the harm can continue. During some U.S. presidencies, global health money comes with restrictions attached via the so-called “Global Gag Rule” (also called the Mexico City Policy or Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance).

While often described as an abortion restriction, the policy also restricts speech, partnerships, medical services, and activities related to abortion, often disrupting work and contracts for health services and coalitions for LGBTQI+ populations. Embassies can be very reluctant to discuss this policy, related restrictions, or their implications even during U.S. administrations friendly to LGBTQI+ rights, and it can feel politically risky to even request more information or clarification.

In addition to real and perceived abortion restrictions, all foreign organization recipients of PEPFAR funds must sign an “anti-prostitution pledge” to certify that they will not “promote or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution or sex trafficking.” While many organizations sign the pledge without making substantive changes to their work, it can be a barrier to many human rights, sex worker rights, and LGBTQI+ groups, especially in key populations consortiums. The Council can help answer questions and connect individuals and organizations to additional support.

When U.S - Funded Facilities are Discriminating Against LGBTQI+ Persons

There have been cases where U.S.-funded facilities have discriminated against LGBTQI+ persons, including extreme cases where HIV/AIDS clinics operating with U.S. foreign assistance have reportedly referred LGBTQI+ clients to so-called conversion therapy programs. U.S.-funded facilities are not allowed to discriminate against LGBTQI+ persons, and they are specifically prohibited from supporting or referring people to conversion therapy programs.

LGBTQI+ discrimination must never be tolerated, and all cases of discrimination should be reported to the management of the discriminatory facility or program. The Council can help to file a complaint with senior officials in Washington if local complaints are ineffective or potentially dangerous.

When Pride or Other Embassy Events Create Backlash

During Pride month each year, the State Department increasingly recognizes employees who are part of the LGBTQI+ community by raising Pride and Progress flags in embassies and consulates, and U.S. officials worldwide participate in virtual and in-person Pride events. These Pride events reiterate the U.S. government's commitment to its LGBTQI+ employees and serve as a source of inspiration for community members in the countries where the events are held. At the same time, however, it is essential to keep in mind that in some instances, a simple gesture of raising the Pride Flag by the embassy has led to backlash and denunciation of local communities. There was, for example, significant backlash against a Pride reception at the U.S. embassy in Pakistan in 2011 after the local media covered the event and conservative Islamic groups protested against what they called “cultural terrorism.”

You should reach out to the U.S. embassy in your country to inquire about planned Pride events and discuss the benefits or potential backlash of public attention to the events. You should also discuss invitations to these events for local community leaders and additional opportunities for partnership and support for locally informed and led Pride events.

Case Study: When Diplomacy Backfires

The strong and principled engagement of a former U.S. ambassador to Zambia offers a cautionary tale. At the end of 2019, then-U.S. Ambassador Daniel Foote spoke publicly in support of the local LGBTQI+ community and said that he was “horrified” by a 15-year prison sentence imposed on a Zambian gay couple under the country’s colonial-era sodomy law. Ambassador Foote’s public statement, posted on the embassy website, was uncharacteristically direct for a U.S. diplomat and reflected the shock that he and many others felt after the sentence was handed down. In response, the government of Zambia asked for him to be removed and the State Department was forced to recall him to the United States, creating a significant diplomatic row between the two countries.

In the end, Ambassador Foote’s principled and highly public stand may have backfired—although it also helped shape the ongoing debate over LGBTQI+ rights in Zambia. This is a cautionary tale, as we caution all embassies and activists to think carefully about the potential cost and benefits of direct U.S. embassy engagement. Sometimes that backlash may be the inevitable result of an important and well-considered diplomatic contribution, but at other times, it may be counterproductive. Local activists are the only ones who can tell the difference, and for that reason, they are indispensable in helping to decide when and how U.S. embassies should speak out. Fortunately, in this case, U.S. embassy staff, in coordination with the broader diplomatic community, remained engaged behind the scenes in support of the couple whose extreme sentence triggered Ambassador Foote’s outrage. The two men were ultimately pardoned by Zambia’s President and released from prison in May of the following year.

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Concluding Advice

In all of these areas, we encourage you to see U.S. embassies as partners in advancing the fundamental human and civil rights of all people, including those from the LGBTQI+ community. Since 2009, when LGBTQI+ human rights issues were explicitly integrated into U.S. human rights policy goals, U.S. embassies have been encouraged to be more visible and more active in this task, and we have seen a marked difference in how embassies are carrying out these duties. However, given demands on embassy officers' time and attention, the best starting point may be for you to initiate contact with the embassy, and to begin developing the type of friendly but professional relationships that can allow you to take advantage of opportunities that may be presented over the course of the year.

It is important to recognize, of course, that your organization will not be the only one seeking embassy attention. There are dozens of issues requiring U.S. advocacy at any given time, and dozens of administrative priorities that may distract or delay action. The personalities and interests of individual personnel may also come into play: just because one official is interested in your organization or issues doesn't guarantee that another will be equally interested.

Your best chance of garnering attention is to anchor your advocacy requests in language understood by diplomatic personnel: that of America's support for equal treatment; for the rule of law; for strong and cohesive communities in which the rights of each individual and minority are fully respected; and for basic freedoms of assembly, expression, and speech, all of which we see as foundational to any truly democratic society. By making common cause with these bedrock goals of U.S. diplomacy, you can strengthen the chances that your concerns will be heard and acted upon.

In a similar vein, it's worth pointing out how the problems that LGBTQI+ individuals are encountering in your country impact negatively on the country's broader cohesion. When LGBTQI+ and other minorities are marginalized economically and excluded from participating openly in society, the social fabric of the country can only fray. Where LGBTQI+ health concerns are ignored, often because same-sex relations are criminalized, the country's broader health inevitably is impacted. And when LGBTQI+ voices are disregarded or cannot be heard, a country's commitment to democracy can only be called into doubt. Make this case in your contacts with the embassy, and you will have a stronger case for embassy support.

Finally, focus on your requests. It will be far easier to convince the embassy to take some action when you can demonstrate that your request is well-founded, specific, and realistic.

Do you need an issue to be raised with the local government? Guide your interlocutor as to whom to seek out and whom to avoid, and where in the government action must be taken. Asking for financial support? Be realistic in your request, thus making clear that you understand the limits on funding, and present a well-thought-out request that shows a concrete, realizable near-term goal and a commitment to results. Looking for a public statement of concern? Again, attach your issue to U.S. principles and values, underscoring that your request is in keeping with the mission of the embassy or consulate.

There's a world of opportunity waiting to be tapped by LGBTQI+ advocacy groups who can partner with U.S. and other embassies. Please join the Council in exploring this new world. We look forward to hearing of the positive results you achieve in your countries.



Appendix A: Key Issues of Concern to the Biden Administration

With information provided in this Guide, we encourage local activists and LGBTQI+ groups to approach U.S. embassies to seek partnerships and support to advance locally identified priorities that meet local needs – not priorities that are of greatest interest to U.S. policymakers at the embassy or back in Washington. That said, it may still be useful to understand some of the issues that are of particular interest to the Biden Administration, often because they have been publicly identified as administration priorities and embassies are required to report to Washington on their engagement around these issues. Situating your local requests in ways that address these issues could be helpful in attracting additional embassy support if policy objectives are in alignment.

Decriminalization

In February 2021, shortly after taking office, President Biden issued a Presidential Memorandum on “Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World,” thus setting his administration’s priorities. The very first section instructs U.S. embassies and diplomats to combat criminalization of LGBTQI+ status or conduct abroad. This is a driving priority for the State Department in Washington that dates back to the Obama Administration.

In addition to a focus on the harms caused by the dozens of sodomy and other related laws that still directly criminalize same-sex relationships and expression around the globe, President Biden’s focus on decriminalization is also increasingly understood as supporting broader reforms to a wide range of laws and regulations that limit the rights and opportunities to LGBTQI+ persons. This now includes, for example, efforts to remove prohibitions on cross-dressing and pass legal gender identity recognition laws to allow transgender and non-binary individuals to change their national identity documents through simple administrative procedures based on the principles of autonomy and self-determination. For more information on this Biden Administration priority, see the Council for Global Equality’s Issue Brief: Toward an Inclusive and Effective Decriminalization Strategy.

Conversion Therapy Practices

So-called “conversion therapy” goes by many names: “conversion practices,” according to many human rights organizations; “sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts,” in the language of academic researchers; and in harmful contexts, “reparative therapy,” “regenerative therapy,” “same-sex attraction support and help,” and many other labels that allow practitioners to evade accountability.

No matter what they are called, conversion therapy practices occur across the globe, in the Global North and Global South, in medical and other clinical settings, in families and faith communities, and in schools and prisons. They are promoted by pseudoscientific experts and by religious leaders from virtually all major faith traditions. The practices have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of LGBTQI+ survivors. Many survivors suffer from depression, social anxiety, substance abuse, and/or thoughts of or attempts of suicide.

Conversion therapy practices have been thoroughly debunked and discredited, and dozens of national and international professional organizations – including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics – have forcefully and comprehensively condemned conversion therapy practices. Similarly, the United Nations has concluded that such practices can amount to torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

In June 2022, President Biden issued an Executive Order declaring that the Administration “must safeguard LGBTQI+ youth from dangerous practices like so-called ‘conversion therapy,’” both at home and overseas. To this end, the White House instructed the State Department to “develop an action plan to promote an end to its use around the world,” through the use of foreign assistance programs, participation in multilateral development banks and international development institutions, and through other work by U.S. embassies and missions worldwide. U.S. embassies also must now report on the use of conversion therapy practices in their annual human rights reports.

With this new focus, U.S. embassies should be very eager to meet with local groups to receive information and reports on these practices in your country. See the Council for Global Equality’s Issue Brief with recommendations to the U.S. government on how to oppose these practices globally.

Freedom of Expression and Association

Given the strong free speech protections in the U.S. Constitution and associated free speech and free association traditions in U.S. jurisprudence, U.S. embassies and diplomats often have a natural inclination to seek out and support freedom of association and freedom of expression-related campaigns or cases. This could include support for banned Pride marches or for other demonstrations or gatherings. It also could help leverage support for legal claims to register local LGBTQI+ civil society organizations under local association or tax laws governing other charitable or civil society organizations in the country. These NGO registration cases can be especially difficult in countries where LGBTQI+ relationships are criminalized, as local officials may seek to deny legal recognition or tax status to an LGBTQI+ association by claiming that it is organized to support activities deemed criminal under local laws. The United States also stands as a vocal critic of foreign agent laws that limit LGBTQI+ and other civil society organizations from receiving

international funding or partnering with foreign organizations or governments. This bundle of freedom of expression and association issues should be of significant interest to U.S. embassy officials.

Hate Crimes, Forced Anal Exams, and Torture

U.S. authorities are required to deny visas and prohibit travel to the United States of foreign government officials and their immediate family members if there is credible evidence to believe that they have been involved in “a gross violation of human rights.” Additional, although generally discretionary, asset sections also may apply. Given these sanctions requirements, U.S. embassies are required to report on human rights violations that could trigger mandatory or discretionary sanctions against individual human rights perpetrators.

In the context of extreme violence against LGBTQI+ persons, this most likely would involve cases of murder, disappearance, extreme hate crimes, and torture. Under the torture heading, most human rights experts now believe that this should include the use of forced anal exams by state officials as a discredited forensic tool to try to prove illegal sexual activity. Anal and related virginity exams lack forensic credibility, are strictly condemned by the World Health Organization, and should be considered forms of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in custodial settings. When administered by medical personnel or in a medical setting, the procedures also should be identified as a severe violation of medical ethics. In all such contexts, forced anal exams could lead to U.S. sanctions against foreign officials who order or perform them.

A bill pending in the U.S. Congress would clarify the types of violence directed at LGBTQI+ persons that necessarily trigger sanctions, spelling out for the first time the following crimes in clear terms as sanctionable offenses: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; prolonged detention without charges and trial; causing the disappearance of such persons by the abduction and clandestine detention of such persons; or other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of such persons.

Human rights reports raising these extreme human rights violations should motivate U.S. embassies to open sanctions-related inquiries. If they do not, please contact the Council to discuss additional options to trigger a sanctions investigation.

Intersex Violations

The Biden Administration has committed to documenting human rights abuses targeting the rights of intersex persons, including the prevalence of coerced intersex “normalization” surgeries, also sometimes referred to as Intersex Genital Mutilation (IGM). U.S. embassies are required to report on these abusive procedures whereby intersex babies or youth are subjected to harmful and medically unnecessary surgeries without informed consent. Unlike gender-affirming care for transgender individuals, intersex surgeries are imposed on infants and children before they are old enough to express their own wishes, carry high

risks of serious physical and psychological harm, and have been deemed a form of torture in health care settings by the United Nations. Information on local efforts to ban such procedures should be brought to the attention of the embassy to be included in the State Department's annual human rights report. Intersex-related cases of infanticide, as well as discrimination against intersex individuals in society, also should be reported to the U.S. embassy.



Appendix B: Sample Correspondence

- Sample Email to U.S. Human Rights Reporting Officer
- Sample Backgrounder for Human Rights Reporting Officer at the U.S. Embassy in “The Republic of Oz”
- Human Rights Developments for LGBTQI+ People in “The Republic of Oz”
 - Legal Status
 - Current Social Context
 - Media

Sample Email to US Human Rights Reporting Officer

[Insert Date]

Dear [insert name of human rights reporting officer at the embassy or use "U.S. Embassy Representative" if you are sending this to a general email address]:

My organization, [insert NGO name and website, if you have one], supports human rights for LGBTQI+ persons in this country. I have noticed that in recent State Department reports on human rights conditions, the embassy has been reporting on trends in human rights protections for LGBTQI+ individuals. I am writing because my organization would like to work with you to provide additional information for next year's report. I also hope to introduce my organization so that you might rely on us as a source of information and engagement on LGBTQI+ issues in the future.

I wonder if you might be available to meet with me to discuss these issues in more detail? I am available to meet in person or by phone or internet link.

My organization was very pleased to see that LGBTQI+ issues are of concern to the embassy and indeed to Americans who read the State Department report. We are excited to work with you to help support that reporting and your engagement on LGBTQI+ issues generally.

Sincerely,

[Insert name and contact information]

Sample Backgrounder for the Human Rights Officer at the U.S. Embassy in “The Republic of Oz”

This is a sample background report from an LGBTQI+ advocacy group in a fictional country (The Republic of Oz) to the human rights officer stationed at the U.S. embassy in that country. This sample provides an example of the type of information that the human rights officer will be looking for to draft an annual human rights report for the embassy. (See the section on Human Rights Reporting on page 6.) U.S. embassies normally draft their human rights reports in August or September and then send them to Washington for further review. Try to reach out to the embassy in June or July to provide this sort of information to the embassy before they write their first draft.

Human Rights Developments for LGBTQI+ People in “The Republic of Oz”

Legal Status

The criminal code of The Republic of Oz provides a penalty of up to 14 years in prison for consensual adult sexual relations between people of the same sex. There were at least three arrests last year based on this provision. One of the individuals was convicted. Two have been released on bail. The pending charges against them have made their lives exceedingly difficult, and one of them is now in hiding. Newspaper articles about the arrests are attached. In particular, it would be helpful if the U.S. Embassy could report on these three cases and ask to visit the man who is detained in prison to verify his conditions of detention. We are very concerned about his safety in detention.

In addition to these three arrests, the police regularly harass and detain individuals suspected of being LGBTQI+. Elite presidential security forces, referred to colloquially as the “flying monkeys,” are particularly known for their abuse of LGBTQI+ individuals and other “social undesirables.” Police and security officials often ask LGBTQI+ people to pay a bribe so that they can avoid detention or to be released while in detention. The police sometimes encourage violence by placing individuals in large common cells and announcing to the other detainees that they are sharing a cell with an LGBTQI+ person.

Transgender individuals are not allowed to change their gender markers on their identity cards without a court order, and that is very difficult if not impossible to obtain. Transgender individuals are harassed by the police and often detained based on outdated laws that prohibit so-called “cross dressing” and “indecent behavior” in public.

Conversion therapy practices that try to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity are common. Many are performed in religious contexts, but some are carried out in hospitals and detention facilities. There are no laws banning or otherwise restricting so-called conversion therapies, and youth are often subjected to these harmful practices against their will. Government officials publicly encourage parents to send their children to these facilities.

There is little understanding of intersex persons, and intersex babies are subjected to so-called “normalizing” surgeries without the informed consent of parents. As they grow up, these children are rarely informed that they were born with intersex traits, and in many cases their parents do not know or fully understand either. Our organization is beginning to educate doctors and hospitals about the longtime physical and social harms caused by these unnecessary intersex surgeries.

Our organization has prepared a report to the United Nations outlining these concerns and asking that the Human Rights Council respond to these human rights violations. A copy of that UN submission is attached.

Current Social Context

LGBTQI+ people have fewer educational and employment opportunities, and societal discrimination is severe. Oz consistently ranks among the least developed countries in terms of life expectancy, education, and general poverty indicators. Even within this context, the LGBTQI+ community is disproportionately impacted by all of these social trends.

Over the past decade, growing poverty, a significant HIV/AIDS crisis, and the lasting impact of COVID-19 have led to a remarkable deterioration in the health and living standards of the LGBTQI+ community. Individuals who are, or are perceived to be, LGBTQI+ are often dismissed by their employers, kicked out of schools, and denied access to public services, including health services, or housing. Reports (attached) from some international HIV/AIDS service providers in the country discuss this extreme social exclusion.

Violent crime targeting LGBTQI+ individuals is also a significant problem. The police rarely investigate and often refuse to even file complaints when victims of LGBTQI+ violence attempt to report crimes. Recent sexual assaults have targeted lesbian women, with reports suggesting that some of the attackers were seeking to “cure” the victims by forcing them to have heterosexual intercourse. One of these women was killed. Alarming reports also note that transgender sex workers are being killed under suspicious circumstances. To date, these reports have not been investigated by the police. See newspaper articles describing some of these incidents attached.

Media

Throughout the year, some local newspapers have printed stories that are demeaning to LGBTQI+ individuals and suggest that they are trying to abuse local children and are undermining social values. A copy of one of these stories is attached. As you will see, it is not based on any actual facts and relies instead on stereotypes and bias.

The Council for 
Global Equality

Advancing LGBTQI+ Inclusion in U.S. Foreign
Policy