



Defending Equality Against Backlash: A Call-to-Action

November 2025

In the face of increasingly coordinated anti-rights movements and a simultaneous resurgence of authoritarianism, the Trump administration is actively undermining human rights protections for LGBTQI+ persons both in the United States and around the world. The United States is not only

advancing domestic and foreign policies that threaten the lives of LGBTQI+ persons, but also withdrawing from and undermining multilateral institutions that are leading international protection efforts, including the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), the UN Human Rights Council, and regional human rights bodies such as the Organization of American States. The United States is now a global leader in an organized international campaign to undercut the rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

The Council for Global Equality (CGE), a coalition of 45 prominent U.S.-based organizations, each standing at the intersection of human rights and LGBTQI+ equality in the United States and overseas, supports a multifaceted response to this protection crisis. As part of that response,

we urgently call on Equal Rights Coalition member states to leverage their human rights and development commitments, coupled with both public and private diplomacy, to counter Trump administration policies and rhetoric that stand to undermine decades of global efforts toward LGBTQI+ inclusion.

As civil society from the United States, we do not suggest that the United States is exceptional, or that our government's opposition to ERC efforts will be decisive. To the contrary, we suggest here that this is an exceptional moment of global backlash for the LGBTQI+ movement, and that the United States, by shifting so quickly and decisively from a position of leadership in the ERC to leading the ERC opposition, must now be confronted and managed in strategic ways to preserve our collective agenda. **We therefore respectfully urge the ERC to coordinate internally across its member states and civil society partners to support the following ten points of action in response to this moment of U.S. regression.**

1

ERC member states must stand firmly in opposition to anti-rights policies and actions around the world, including denouncing the Trump administration's record on the rights of LGBTQI+ persons in the United States itself.

The Trump administration's policies, particularly those that target the lives of transgender individuals, undermine broader protections for all. ERC member states must publicly call out the Trump administration's attacks on LGBTQI+ Americans, much as they have done in other countries that have advanced anti-LGBTQI+ policies and laws.

2

ERC member states must publicly refute and oppose anti-LGBTQI+ policies and rhetoric by U.S. government officials that seek to undermine universal human rights protections and institutions in international and multilateral fora.

Outrageous, false, or otherwise rights-denying statements by U.S. diplomats in human rights fora, or attempts to remove language from international resolutions related to gender equality, sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics, must never go unchallenged. This will require both public and private efforts to push back against alternative, anti-rights norms that are being advanced by the United States in texts such as the so-called "Geneva Consensus Declaration," and through concepts such as "Natural Rights," "Human Flourishing," and "Remigration". The Trump administration uses these specious terms and concepts to undermine and oppose the human rights of all marginalized communities, including women, refugees, and LGBTQI+ persons. These new talking points are also

purposefully and dangerously divested from the international human rights norms and institutions that have helped build the legal case for LGBTQI+ inclusion over many decades.

3

In the absence of U.S. engagement with LGBTQI+ human rights organizations at the embassy-level, **ERC member states should designate at least one lead ERC embassy in priority countries facing significant anti-LGBTQI+ backlash to coordinate responses, channel support and advocacy, provide safe meeting spaces, and monitor local developments.** Designating one specific embassy as lead will enhance effectiveness and strengthen the ERC's response to emergencies that arise, including threats to LGBTQI+ human rights defenders and laws and policies curtailing the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. It will also reduce the burden on directly impacted activists and organizations, who are often overwhelmed by multiple, repeat inquiries from embassy representatives. ERC member states also should consider leveraging regional networks of embassies to share coordination and best practices, as anti-LGBTQI+ legislation is often replicated in nearly identical form across countries and regions.

4

In the face of the Trump administration's withholding of funds and drastic decrease in development and humanitarian assistance, including the dismantling of USAID, the termination of the Global Equality Fund, and extreme cuts to global health and PEPFAR, **ERC governments must set ambitious new goals to increase their overall funding**

commitments to LGBTQI+ civil society, and to fund in more innovative ways to reach those most impacted by cuts to foreign assistance.

This must include short-, mid-, and long-term commitments to fund tailored and targeted programs to address the development and humanitarian needs of LGBTQI+ persons around the world. Each donor government should allocate, at minimum, 0.3% of total Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). This would represent a landscape-shifting investment in the LGBTQI+ movement at a crucial moment of global push-back. In cases where foreign assistance cuts are temporarily inevitable, they should not be proportional for communities that have been systematically excluded and for whom there are few global donors.

5

Given the Trump administration's harmful arguments against inclusive development, **ERC member states must proactively advance a model for inclusive development that**

emphasizes the human rights imperative, cost effectiveness, and long-term benefits of development aid that promotes democratic pluralism and reaches those who are most marginalized in any society, including LGBTQI+ persons, women and girls, and other excluded minorities. ERC member states should regularly highlight the positive outcomes of inclusive investments and vigilantly push-back against misinformation and disinformation about past investments by the United States and other ERC countries in the Global Equality Fund. This should be complemented by the defense of and additional support for a rights-based, inclusion-driven approach within international financial institutions, such as the World Bank

6

ERC member states and civil society should continue to engage privately with career U.S. diplomats to the degree possible and in consultation with local LGBTQI+ human

rights organizations. Many career U.S. diplomats, particularly those posted to embassies in severely restrictive countries, have supported outreach to LGBTQI+ human rights organizations and leaders in the past and are deeply troubled by the Trump administration's policy reversals. Some may continue to be helpful points of contact.

7

With the Trump administration's politicization of its sanctions authorities, the **ERC must coordinate and strengthen other sanctions regimes at bilateral and**

regional levels that apply financial and visa restrictions on perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses against LGBTQI+ persons. In some cases, the application of sanctions has helped reduce threats faced by LGBTQI+ persons in criminalized countries. This momentum must not be lost. Instead, it could be leveraged to achieve policy goals, such as the end to the use of harmful practices like forced anal examinations and virginity tests.

8

With the loss of emergency funding through the Global Equality Fund and the destruction of both USAID and the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human

Rights, and Labor, **human rights defenders who were previously supported by the United States must be supported and empowered through funding, opportunities for growth and networking, and safeguards for their mental and physical well-being.** ERC member states must commit to protecting human rights defenders by connecting them to all available human rights mechanisms to bolster advocacy efforts, which may include facilitating and expediting visa appointments and guaranteeing safe passage. Additionally, ERC member states and embassies should, in coordination with civil society networks, set aside funding for safety and security for crisis response and immediate, emergency relocation.



Given the destruction of the United States Refugee Admissions Program and restrictions to asylum, **ERC member states must establish pathways and increase admissions goals for vulnerable LGBTQI+ persons to obtain refugee, asylum, or humanitarian protection status.** These programs are a lifeline to those at direct risk for their work to protect the rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world.



In response to the recent increase of countries joining anti-rights movements, the **ERC should increase and diversify its membership by enlisting additional member states, with a focus on regions such as the Caribbean and Southern Africa that remain unrepresented.** Symbolically, the number of ERC member states should remain greater than the number of country signatories to the Geneva Consensus Declaration – there are currently 40 country signatories to the Geneva Consensus Declaration and 44 member states in the Equal Rights Coalition. The recruitment of additional member states, however, should not come at the expense of the immediate protection needs of LGBTQI+ human rights defenders at regional and country levels. Rather, by demonstrating effective outcomes, the ERC's engagement and success should serve as a recruitment tool to grow the membership and build consensus for protection needs.