



Call to Action

BACKGROUND

In the **Human Rights Report for 2007** (released on March 11, 2008), the State Department once again lists human rights concerns relating to sexual orientation and gender identity in more than 100 different countries. (Please see the LGBT Foreign Policy Project summary of the U.S. State Department Report on Human Rights abuses abroad.)

- The reported violations this year include murders, extreme police violence, arrests of individuals based only on their sexual orientation or gender identity, state-sponsored harassment, extortion, and abuse in detention, and the denial of health care, housing, education and other social services. Reports of violence directed at transvestite and transgender activists in Latin America are increasing. And the reports point once again to the failure of the police to protect gay pride marchers in several East European countries.
- Not only are such abuses documented in countries with strained relations with the U.S. (Iran, Cuba), but also in countries considered close friends and allies (Jamaica, Poland), and in places where the Bush Administration has put forward a clear strategic interest in fostering genuine democracy (Egypt, Iraq, Russia).
- Many of these violations involve non-state actors, including gangs, paramilitary groups, self-appointed morality police and individual family members, but the abuses themselves are treated with impunity or actively encouraged by the state.
- In many cases there is also evidence of government refusal to provide legal remedies in the country's court system. This creates an unacceptably hostile public climate that makes it nearly impossible for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people to assert their legitimate human rights.

THE U.S. MUST MOVE FROM A "REPORTING AGENDA" TO A "PROTECTION AGENDA"

- The State Department has been reporting on the growing crisis in abuses against LGBT individuals and their communities worldwide since 1990. But the State



Department's response often ends there. Today, eighteen years later, it is time for the State Department to move beyond a reporting agenda to an affirmative "protection agenda" that recognizes that *LGBT rights are human rights*.

- The United States must join European and Latin American countries (many of whom have now surpassed the U.S.) in their commitment to ending violence and discrimination against LGBT communities.
- The United States' reporting on, and action against, violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity must be based upon the clear standards in international human rights law that prohibit discrimination and abuse.
- A new protection agenda will require a careful examination of how U.S. embassies, funding missions and diplomatic interactions at the United Nations and elsewhere reflect the human rights concerns of LGBT people and communities.
- At minimum, the State Department should:
 - Highlight sexual orientation and gender identity as important components within a broad U.S. commitment to renewing and restoring its human rights credibility worldwide;
 - Appoint a liaison within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor to follow LGBT concerns raised in this year's report and coordinate next year's reporting on LGBT issues;
 - Host a roundtable of human rights-focused U.S. diplomats (including those abroad) and human rights NGOs to solicit feedback on how to move from a reporting agenda to a protection agenda in response to documented patterns of LGBT human rights violations;
 - Develop more specific instructions and training for all embassies to assist their reporting on LGBT human rights concerns in future reports, including more focused reporting on lesbian and transgender abuses, and distribute to all human rights reporting officers copies of the influential "Yogyakarta Principles" (see Appendix A), which provide guidance on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity;
 - Develop appropriate mechanisms and opportunities to increase U.S. government funding through USAID, the State Department or other institutions, for rights-focused LGBT organizations internationally.
 - Foster greater diversity within the State Department by ending employment-related disparities in overseas posting benefits and other employment benefits that limit the career options of LGBT employees with spouses or domestic partners.



About the Council for Global Equality and the LGBT Foreign Policy Project

Launched late in 2007 as the *LGBT Foreign Policy Project*, the **Council for Global Equality** is a new coalition effort that encourages a clearer and stronger American voice on international LGBT human rights concerns. This initiative comes at an important moment in the global struggle for LGBT equality, when LGBT and related sexual rights advances are taking hold at the international level and changing political directions offer robust new opportunities to support LGBT human rights. The Project works closely with both the domestic LGBT community and with human rights advocacy organizations in the United States to shape U.S. diplomatic positions on LGBT issues at the international level. The Project demands that those who represent our country—in Congress, in the White House, in U.S. embassies and in U.S. corporations around the world—use the diplomatic, political and economic leverage available to them to oppose human rights abuses that are regularly directed against individuals because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.



LGBT Foreign Policy Project