

January 27, 2006

ONGLINE

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John Ong

UN: U.S. ALIGNED WITH IRAN IN ANTI-GAY VOTE

Rice Must Explain Repressive UN Ban on LGBT Rights Groups

http://www.ilga.org/news_results.asp?LanguageID=1&FileID=743&FileCategory=1&ZonID=6

(Washington, D.C., January 25, 2006) - In a reversal of policy, the United States on Monday backed an Iranian initiative to deny United Nations consultative status to organizations working to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. In a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a coalition of 40 organizations, led by the Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights Watch, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, called for an explanation of the vote which aligned the United States with governments that have long repressed the rights of sexual minorities.

"This vote is an aggressive assault by the U.S. government on the right of sexual minorities to be heard," said Scott Long, director of the LGBT rights program at Human Rights Watch. "It is astonishing that the Bush administration would align itself with Sudan, China, Iran and Zimbabwe in a coalition of the homophobic."

In May 2005, the International Lesbian and Gay Association, which is based in Brussels, and the Danish gay rights group Landsforeningen for Bøsser og Lesbiske (LBL) applied for consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Consultative status is the only official means by which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world can influence and participate in discussions among

member states at the United Nations. Nearly 3,000 groups enjoy this status.

States opposed to the two groups' applications moved to have them summarily dismissed, an almost unprecedented move at the UN, where organizations are ordinarily allowed to state their cases. The U.S. abstained on a vote which would have allowed the debate to continue and the groups to be heard. It then voted to reject the applications.

"The United States recklessly ignored its own reporting proving the need for international support for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese. "The State Department's 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices' show severe human rights violations based on gender identity and sexual orientation occur around the world."

As the U.S. government acknowledged in its 2004 country report on Iran, Iranian law punishes homosexual conduct between men with the death penalty. Human Rights Watch has documented four cases of arrests, flogging, or execution of gay men in Iran since 2003. In its 2004 country report on Zimbabwe, the U.S. government noted President Robert Mugabe's public denouncement of homosexuals, blaming them for "Africa's ills." In the past, Mugabe has called gays and lesbians "people without rights" and "worse than dogs and pigs."

The U.S. has reversed position since 2002, when it voted to support the International Les-

bian and Gay Association's request to have its status reviewed. Officials gave no explanation for the change.

"It is deeply disturbing that, at the UN, the United States has shifted gears toward an aggressive stance against human rights for LGBT people," said Paula Ettelbrick, executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. "Unfortunately, denying LGBT groups a voice and a presence within the United Nations – the world's most important human rights institution – is fully in keeping with the U.S.'s assault on basic human rights principles worldwide."

In voting against the applications to the NGO committee, the U.S. was joined by Cameroon, China, Cuba, Iran, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Votes in favor of consultative status came from Chile, France, Germany, Peru, and Romania. Colombia, India, and Turkey abstained, while Côte d'Ivoire was absent.

"It is an absolute outrage that the United States has chosen to align itself with oppressive governments – all in an effort to smother the voices of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people around the world," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "It is deeply disturbing that the self-proclaimed 'leader of the free world' will ally with bigots at the drop of a hat to advance the right wing's anti-gay agenda."

In addition to the Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights Watch, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the organizations signing the letter are:

Advocates for Youth
Al-Fatiha Foundation for LGBT Muslims
Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School
Amnesty International USA
Catholics for a Free Choice
Center for Health and Gender Equity
(CHANGE)
Center for Women's Global Leadership
Colombian Lesbian and Gay Association
(COLEGA)
Congregation Beth Simchat Torah
Equality Now
Family Care International
Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
Gay Men's Health Crisis
Global Rights
Immigration Equality
International Women's Human Rights Clinic, City University of New York School of Law
Ipas
Jan Hus Church
Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund
Latino Commission on AIDS
L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center
Legal Momentum
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (New York City)
MADRE
Mano a Mano
Metropolitan Community Churches
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition Building Institute
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Caucus
National Center for Lesbian Rights
New Hampshire Freedom to Marry Coalition
Open Society Institute
Queer Progressive Agenda
Queers for Economic Justice
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S.

Women's Environment and Development Organization

For further information, please contact:
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(Human Rights Campaign): +1-202-216-1580, or
+1-202-716-1650 (cell)

In New York, Scott Long (Human Rights Watch): +1-212-216-1297, or +1-646-641-5655 (cell)

In New York, Geoffrey Knox (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission): +1-212-229-0540, or +1-917-414-1749 (cell)

In New York, Roberta Sklar (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force): +1-646-358-1465

Letter to Condoleezza Rice

January 25, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

On behalf of forty U.S.-based organizations advocating for human rights, including the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, we write to express deep disappointment at the United States' actions this week in the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Committee of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

As you may be aware, both the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), and the Danish national gay and lesbian organization Landsforeningen for Bøsser og Lesbiske (LBL) had applied for consultative status with ECOSOC. The United States abstained on a virtually unprecedented motion to deny these organizations a fair hearing on their application. Still more disturbingly, the United States supported a separate motion to summarily dismiss their applications. The motion to dismiss passed by a vote of 10 to 5 with three abstentions.

Monday's vote represents a reversal of U.S. policy. When ECOSOC voted on ILGA's previous application for consultative status in 2002, the United States joined sixteen other nations in supporting ILGA's application for consultative status.

We hope you will provide the reasons for this reversal. Is it now the policy of the U.S. government to oppose consultative status for all organizations working to promote the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people?

As the State Department's own reporting demonstrates, severe human rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression take place in many countries around the world. Arbitrary arrest, torture, and extrajudicial killing are common. We are grateful for the State Department's effort to include these incidents in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. We find it incomprehensible that the U.S. government would recognize these human rights abuses—while denying the people subject to them the right to make their case, alongside other respected human rights organizations, before the U.N. It is, moreover, widely recognized that persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression drives populations vulnerable to HIV/AIDS underground, and contributes substantially to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

As long as human rights abuses against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people occur, it is vital that NGOs working on their behalf are given a place and voice at the United Nations. Applications of three other such organizations are pending before ECOSOC: the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe), Coalition Gaie et Lesbienne du Québec (CGLQ) from Canada, and Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland (LSVD) from Germany. We urge you to support these applications. In this week's vote, the U.S. ranged itself on the side of severely repressive governments. As U.S.-based organizations working in the fields of human rights and sexual rights, we are dismayed—and we expect better.

Please reply to Scott Long, Director, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Program, Human Rights Watch, 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th floor, New York, NY 10018-3299 (tel: 212-216-1297).

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
Al-Fatiha Foundation for LGBT Muslims
Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School
Amnesty International USA
Catholics for a Free Choice

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National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition Building Institute Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Caucus
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
National Center for Lesbian Rights
New Hampshire Freedom to Marry Coalition
Open Society Institute
Queer Progressive Agenda
Queers for Economic Justice
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S.
Women's Environment and Development Organization

Cc: The Honorable John Bolton, United Nations Ambassador for the United States
The Honorable Richard G. Lugar, Chair, United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee
The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Ranking Member, United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee
The Honorable Henry J. Hyde, Chair, United States House of Representatives International Relations Committee
The Honorable Tom Lantos, Ranking Member, United States House of Representatives International Relations Committee
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Chair, United States Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, United States Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs
The Honorable Frank Wolf, Chair, United States House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce and Related Agencies
The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan, Ranking Member, United States House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce and Related Agencies