



Global Forum on MSM & HIV Applauds Congressional Resolutions against Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill, Public Statements by President Obama and Secretary Clinton

Key Leaders in U.S. Congress take action to denounce proposed legislation that would violate human rights, undermine AIDS response; President and Secretary of State speak out against the bill

Oakland, Calif., February 5, 2010 - The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) applauds key leaders in U.S. Congress for standing up for the health and human rights of men who have sex with men by taking a clear position against draconian anti-gay legislation proposed in Uganda, as well as the recent strong public statements against the bill by President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

On Wednesday, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA) introduced House Resolution 1064, which condemns Uganda's proposed Anti-homosexuality bill and highlights the ways in which bill's severe penalties against gay men undermine an effective HIV response. The resolution calls upon the President and the Secretary of State to affirm U.S. belief in the "intrinsic human dignity of all Ugandans, regardless of sexual orientation" and to ensure that resources committed to the global AIDS response are "efficient, effective, and appropriate to the local epidemiology of the disease".

On Thursday, U.S. Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI), Tom Coburn (R-OK), Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced a Senate Resolution that also condemns Uganda's Anti-homosexuality bill and calls for the rejection and repeal of similar criminalization laws in all other countries. The resolution notes that "religious leaders in the United States, along with representatives from the Vatican and the Anglican Church, have stated that laws criminalizing homosexuality are unjust" and encourages the Secretary of State to "closely monitor human rights abuses that occur because of sexual orientation".

Both the President and Secretary of State have previously expressed opposition to Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill, and they again addressed the issue at the National Prayer Breakfast on Thursday. President Obama characterized the proposed legislation as "odious", and stated that it is "unconscionable to target gays and lesbians for who they are" both in the United States and abroad. Secretary Clinton affirmed the human rights of all people, including "gays and lesbians who deserve to be treated as full human beings" and let it be known that she had recently called President Museveni to express "the strongest concerns" about the Anti-homosexuality law being considered in Uganda.

"Addressing HIV is not just about providing services – it's about creating an enabling social, political and legal environment in which people feel safe and accepted, free from stigma, discrimination or criminal reprisals" said George Ayala, Executive Officer of the MSMGF. "Gay men and other men who have sex with men continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS in every part of the world, and punitive legal environments only serve to drive them away from the information and services they may need."

In low- and middle-income countries, men who have sex with men are 19 times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general population. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) explicitly identifies men who have sex with men as a strategic population in need of targeted interventions in the program's newly released 5 Year Strategy.

As currently written, Uganda's proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill would strengthen and expand existing criminal laws against same-sex practice, going as far as sanctioning the death penalty in some instances, including for same-sex acts in which one partner is living with HIV.

The MSMGF supports recent denouncements of the Ugandan proposed legislation, and salutes the President, Secretary of State for their statements, as well as members of congress who have co-sponsored the resolutions reaffirming the universality of human rights and the United States unequivocal opposition to Uganda's Anti-homosexuality bill.



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A statement issued Wednesday by the Committee on Foreign Affairs indicated that more than three dozen members of Congress joined Congressman Berman in introducing the House resolution, including Committee Ranking Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank (D-MA); Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Chair Donald Payne (D-NJ); Congressional Black Caucus Chair Barbara Lee (D-CA); and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Co-Chair of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus.

The Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF) is an expanding network of AIDS organizations, MSM networks, and advocates committed to ensuring robust coverage of and equitable access to effective HIV prevention, care, treatment, and support services tailored to the needs of gay men and other MSM. Guided by a Steering Committee of 20 members from 17 countries situated mainly in the Global South, and with administrative and fiscal support from AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA), the MSMGF works to promote MSM health and human rights worldwide through advocacy, information exchange, knowledge production, networking, and capacity building.