

Testimony of JoDee Winterhof
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Madam Chair and members of the subcommittee:

My name is JoDee Winterhof , and I am the Senior Vice President for Policy and Political Affairs at the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) equality. I am testifying today in support of the State-Foreign Operations (SFOPS) budget for fiscal year 2020 and specifically for the work of the State Department and USAID to defend and advance the human rights of LGBTQ people around the globe, primarily through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), and through the Development Assistance account.

Even as this body works to advance the Equality Act to move our own country to a more perfect union, LGBTQ people around the world face daily challenges to be who they are, safe from violence or death. Therefore, it is not an understatement to say that the situation LGBTQ people face in many parts of the world is dire.

- In up to 69 countries, same-sex activity is criminalized, and in 10 of those, it is punishable by death.
- Another three countries have so-called anti-propaganda laws that inhibit the ability to speak openly about LGBTQ issues. One of those countries is Russia.
- In the Russian republic of Chechnya, we have seen authorities round up, detain, torture, and even kill people based on their sexual orientation or their gender identity - or even based on the *suspicion* they might be LGBTQ.
- In the fall of 2017, Egyptian authorities rounded up dozens of LGBTQ people after someone was photographed raising a rainbow flag at a rock concert in Cairo that September.
- Authorities in Indonesia have publicly flogged people who had been accused of homosexuality in front of jeering crowds of thousands of people.
- Around the world, at least 2,982 transgender people were murdered between January 1 2008 and October 1, 2018. More than four-fifths of those murders occurred in Central and South America.¹

¹ <https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-trans-day-of-remembrance-2018/>

While the environment is extraordinarily challenging, LGBTQ advocates around the globe continue their truly inspiring and amazing work to fight for their own human rights and dignity, as well as the rights of others in the broader community. We stand in awe of their bravery and courage and strongly urge this committee to help them to advance their work as they join efforts to protect human rights for all people, no matter who they are or whom they love.

They are activists like Caleb Orozco, the executive director of United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM). Despite threats against his life and enormous legal barriers, he successfully challenged his government's colonial-era law outlawing homosexuality and won his case at the highest court in Belize in 2016.

Or Thu Le, a former fellow at the Human Rights Campaign, who works at the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE) in Vietnam. Established in 2007, they conduct research on vulnerable groups in Vietnam and then use that evidence to advocate for equal rights for LGBTI people and ethnic minorities.

Or Hazel Mokgathi, an HRC Global Innovator, who worked with the African Women for Sexual Health and Gender Justice to hold the first-ever transgender pride event in Botswana in October 2018.

Or Georgian activist Levan Berianidze who, along with a friend, was attacked and beaten by a mob that was shouting homophobic slurs. When the men sought help from the police, the police joined in the attack, rather than protecting the victims. Nevertheless, with incredible resilience, the Georgian LGBTQ community responded by calling on their government to conduct an investigation into the case and punish the police officers involved, and also create and implement a hate crimes policy and strategic plan for implementation.

These are just a few examples of the incredible work being done around the world - but it cannot happen without help from partners in the United States and other countries.

That is why we strongly support the work of the U.S. State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Rights and Labor's Global Equality Fund (GEF), which "empowers civil society organizations and human rights defenders working to protect and advance the fundamental rights of LGBT and Intersex (LGBTI) persons so that they can live freely and exercise their rights without fear of discrimination or abuse." It is a collaborative, public-private partnership that brings together governments, companies, foundations and NGOs to support civil society organizations that promote the inclusion and dignity

of LGBTI people and send a clear message to the world that LGBTI rights are human rights. We also strongly support the work of the Development Assistance (DA) account, which funds incredibly important LGBTI work through USAID's Human Rights Division.

The need for funding in these two accounts far exceeds the funding currently available. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, for example, receives about four times more LGBTI-specific solicitations than they receive for non-LGBTI programs and are able to fund only 3-5% of the LGBTI-specific funding requests, compared to a funding rate of about 15-20% for non-LGBTI programs. Additionally, the grants are far smaller for LGBTI programs, on average, than they are for non-LGBTI programs, as they attempt to fund as many projects as they can.

We therefore urge the committee to provide \$10 million to the Global Equality Fund and \$5 million to USAID's LGBTI Portfolio to begin addressing that imbalance.

Congress has a crucial role to play in advancing this work and protecting human rights around the globe. LGBTQ and human rights advocates must have the resources and support they need to continue their innovative, creative and inspiring work to change the hearts and minds of their leaders, their fellow citizens and their communities.