

September 24, 2021

Ed Meier, Associate Director, National Security Programs  
Office of Management and Budget (OMB)  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Associate Director Meier:

As President Biden made clear in his Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World, it is the policy of the United States “to pursue an end to violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, or sex characteristics, and to lead by the power of our example in the cause of advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world.”<sup>1</sup> We welcomed this strong statement of policy as a call to action to bring the U.S. back into a position of leadership on global LGBTQI+ rights, especially as it aligns with additional executive actions on global sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equity and equality. However, we know that the United States cannot realize its vision without making substantial investments in global LGBTQI+ rights programs. **Therefore, we, the undersigned 85 organizations, respectfully urge you to support increased funding for global LGBTQI+ rights programs at the State Department’s Global Equality Fund to \$30 million and USAID’s Inclusive Development Hub’s Protection of LGBTQI+ Persons to \$30 million in the President’s Budget Request for FY 2023.**

While several countries have made great strides in the fight for LGBTQI+ rights – including the decriminalization of same-sex relationships in India in 2019, Costa Rica’s legalization of same-sex marriage in 2020, and Argentina’s issuance of non-binary identification cards and passports in 2021 – globally, LGBTQI+ people continue to experience violence, stigma, and discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics. There are 69 countries that criminalize consensual same-sex sexual acts and in 11 of these countries, same-sex relations are punishable by death.<sup>2</sup> Criminal laws and societal discrimination have created barriers to accessing a variety of services, including formal employment, health care, housing, and education, for LGBTQI+ individuals, producing damaging poverty traps and undermining human rights.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the inequalities and vulnerabilities that LGBTQI+ people face worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Many LGBTQI+ people have lost their livelihoods, are at increased risk for gender-based violence, food insecurity, and homelessness, and face even greater barriers to services, including access to sexual and reproductive health care. Yet, COVID-19 relief efforts have largely missed LGBTQI+ communities due to binary gendered approaches to distribution, a reliance on unsafe spaces for LGBTQI+ people, non-inclusive definitions of “family,” and discrimination by relief workers.<sup>4</sup> These concerns also may undermine efforts to promote vaccine uptake in LGBTQI+

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<sup>1</sup> The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/memorandum-advancing-the-human-rights-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-and-intersex-persons-around-the-world/>

<sup>2</sup> ILGA, The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, State-Sponsored Homophobia Report, December 2020

<sup>3</sup> OutRight International. <https://outrightinternational.org/content/vulnerability-amplified-impact-covid-19-pandemic-lgbtq-people>

<sup>4</sup> OutRight International. [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75\\_BriefingPaperNov2020WDonors.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75_BriefingPaperNov2020WDonors.pdf)

communities and efforts to distribute vaccines through national identification systems impede access for transgender individuals, who may hold an identity card that does not correspond with their gender or may live in a country that has recently reversed or banned legal gender recognition.

Meanwhile, Frontline Defenders has documented a worrying trend of LGBTQI+ human rights defenders facing increased risk of arrest, physical attack, or psychological trauma, including raids on homes or homeless shelters, the closure of medical clinics serving the community, and sexual harassment of transgender individuals at check points.<sup>5</sup> Those in the LGBTQI+ community have been scapegoated and falsely charged for spreading COVID-19, while some governments have used COVID-19 lock down measures as an excuse to violate the human rights of LGBTQI+ people and other vulnerable groups. The closure or delay in judiciary processes have slowed down attempts to release those unjustly detained or imprisoned, while also impeding ongoing cases challenging criminalization laws.

The challenges of COVID-19 have only increased the demand for funding by LGBTQI+ organizations which have stepped in to support the humanitarian aid needs of their communities. In April of 2020, Outright International launched its COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund, the largest global COVID-19 response fund for LGBTQI+ communities in the world. Since its inception, the fund has received more than 3,000 applications from organizations in 131 countries totaling \$30 million in funding requests. A majority of need was focused on alleviating hunger, providing health care, and sustaining the survival of LGBTQI+ human rights organizations.<sup>6</sup> And while OutRight International has been able to reach more than 145,000 people through this mechanism, the COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund has only been able to fund roughly 13% of requests – or roughly \$4 million.

Outside of the pandemic, the funding landscape for LGBTQI+ rights remains severely underfunded. Between 2017 to 2018, global LGBTQI+ funding from donor governments made up less than 4 cents out of every \$100 of international development efforts and assistance, and for many LGBTQI+ organizations, no funding was available within their country of operation. For example, in more than half of the countries in the world where same-sex relations remain illegal, no LGBTQI+ organizations received external support during this same time period. However, this is not only the case in countries that criminalize same-sex relations. According to the F&M Global Barometers on Gay and Trans Rights, there are many countries in the world where LGBTQI+ organizations exist but do not receive outside funding. In 2018, their study found LGBTQI+ organizations in 166 countries, yet only LGBTQI+ organizations in 124 of these countries received external support.

For LBQ, trans, and intersex organizations, the funding landscape is even more limited. Roughly 47% of all LBQ-led organizations operate on less than \$10,000 per year. This number jumps to 56% for trans groups, while only 19% of intersex organizations received more than \$10,000 in external funding.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, and despite their unique expertise, LBQ, trans, and intersex organizations receive only a small percentage of the total funding focused on their populations, or 35%, 41%, and 40% respectively. As a result, LBQ, trans, and intersex organizations often work in survival mode and are unable to implement their full strategies to address harmful gender norms, legal barriers, and other community-led responses to violence, stigma, and discrimination.

As LGBTQI+ organizations struggle to achieve their vision of global equality with limited resources, studies have demonstrated that LGBTQI+ inclusion and rights support development goals. For example,

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<sup>5</sup> Frontline Defenders. [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/front\\_line\\_defenders\\_covid-19.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/front_line_defenders_covid-19.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Global Philanthropy Project. <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/2021/02/02/diving-deeper/#lbqti>

in just two sectors in India, LGBTQI+ exclusion accounted for an estimated \$30 billion in lost GDP.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, a strong correlation has been found between the inclusion and enactment of rights for LGBTQI+ people.<sup>9</sup> A 2018 study from the Williams Institute found that one enacted law in support of LGBTQI+ people is associated with \$2,065 more in GDP per capita,<sup>10</sup> as well as a higher value in human development, as measured by the Human Development Index.

Considering the above, investments in LGBTQI+ focused U.S. foreign assistance programs are essential to achieving the Biden-Harris administration's vision for U.S. leadership on global LGBTQI+ rights and is integral to any COVID-19 relief effort that seeks to address the impacts of the pandemic on the most marginalized populations. Additional funding would go toward addressing significant funding gaps for LGBTQI+ human rights organizations and prevent further backsliding on human rights. Yet, the United States has a long path ahead of it to truly champion LGBTQI+ rights. For the United States to be on par with like-minded governments in support for global LGBTQI+ programming as an averaged percentage of our ODA, the U.S. would need to considerably increase funding for LGBTQI+ rights programs.<sup>11</sup> Increased investment in these programs should also not come at the expense of any other funding streams that promote human rights, gender equality, global health, or the rights of other marginalized populations.

As such, we encourage you to make the following requests to Congress in your proposed FY 2023 budget:

### **1. The Global Equality Fund (GEF): \$30 million**

Located at the State Department and run through the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), the GEF is a leading public-private partnership comprised of like-minded governments and private sector entities dedicated to protecting and defending the human rights and fundamental freedom of LGBTQI+ persons around the world. The GEF leverages pooled investments across entities, funding LGBTQI+ organizations in 100 countries. GEF funding has provided leadership and capacity training to LGBTQI+ organizations to build more sustainable movements, as well as safety and security funds to protect LGBTQI+ human rights defenders worldwide. Through the GEF's funding, over 1,400 human rights defenders and 200 civil society organizations have received emergency assistance, with 99% of beneficiaries reporting that this assistance improved their safety and security. In FY 2020 alone, GEF funding trained and supported nearly 2,500 human rights defenders, provided legal aid or assistance to 1,000 individuals from low-income or marginalized communities, and developed more than 500 digital written tools for human rights defense and advocacy.

Though Congress has appropriated more money for the GEF over the last two fiscal years, including a \$5 million increase above the FY 2021 enacted level in the House-passed FY 2022 appropriations bill, LGBTQI+ funding demands significantly exceed funds available to GEF. In its most recent global solicitation, the GEF will receive roughly \$50 million in global funding requests yet lacks the

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank Group,

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/527261468035379692/pdf/940400WP0Box380usion0of0LGBT0People.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/11/16/492936/transforming-u-s-foreign-policy-ensure-dignity-rights-lgbti-people/>

<sup>10</sup> Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Global-Economy-and-LGBT-Inclusion-Mar-2018.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> For the US to be on par with the Netherlands, Norway or Sweden in terms of averaged percentage of our ODA dedicated to LGBTQI+ funding, the US would need to grow to at least \$90 million annually according to the Global Philanthropy Project's Global Resource Report. <https://globalresourcesreport.org/>

funds to respond to the considerable need from the LGBTQI+ community. An estimated 6% of funding requests to the GEF are able to be met, in comparison to an estimated 15-20% of similar programs.

Likewise, the Equal Rights in Action Fund is a small grants program providing grants to smaller organizations ranging from \$8,000 to \$25,000 upon referral from U.S. embassies and funded through the GEF. Launched in 2018 and run through the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the program has been able to grant over \$1.6 million to local LGBTQI+ organizations but also faces significant levels of demand for funding that it is unable to meet. For example, from 2019-2020, NDI received nominations from both U.S. and GEF partner embassies of 278 LGBTQI+ organizations in 100 countries. Out of the 128 applications they received totaling nearly \$3 million in funding, NDI was only able to provide \$500,000 in grants. NDI, after removing a global call for nominations and extending the program to select countries, continued to receive an overwhelming number of nominations from partner embassies. Out of 187 nominations and 114 applications received, NDI awarded grants to 25 partners, totaling \$600,000. Similar small grants programs for marginalized populations at NDI for disabled peoples and ethnic and religious minorities are able to respond at higher rates to demands for funding and with higher amounts. The chart below includes a breakdown of requests for funding in the 2020-2021 funding cycle.

ERA Funding: 2020-2021				
	Embassy Nominations	Applications Received	Applications Accepted	Percentage Funded
LGBTQI+	187	114	25	22%
Disabled Persons	44	25	11	44%
Freedom of Religion or Belief	22	13	7	46%

**Given GEF funding demands and current capacity capabilities, we request OMB include a U.S. contribution of \$30 million to the GEF in its budget request, which will support staffing needs and LGBTQI+-led organizations on the front lines of human rights defense for their communities.** We also encourage the administration to secure additional support for the GEF from other governments and donors to continue to leverage pooled investments in support of global LGBTQI+ rights.

## **2. USAID Inclusive Development Hub's Protection of LGBTQI+ Persons: \$30 million**

USAID supports LGBTQI+ programs focused on anti-LGBTQI+ violence, discrimination, stigma, and criminalization. In addition to USAID's Human Rights Grants Program, which responds to urgent or unanticipated human rights threats to LGBTQI+ individuals, USAID hosts the LGBTI Global Human Rights Initiative (GHRI), a public-private funding mechanism to which other governments and entities also contribute. USAID's programs have supported Bangladeshi civil society advocates in securing a third gender option in the country's 2021 National Census, anti-LGBTQI+ stigma and discrimination workshops with Guatemalan government officials, and safety and security toolkits for at-risk human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> USAID. <https://medium.com/usaid-2030/5-ways-usaid-promotes-lgbtqi-inclusion-around-the-world-dd665506c7ab>

Though Congress has increased funding for USAID's LGBTQI+ programs, USAID's programs remain financially strapped. In FY 2021, USAID's LGBTQI+ programs received \$6 million through the appropriations process and, in the most recently passed FY 2022 House Appropriations bill, an additional \$4m was allocated to support the widespread demand for LGBTQI+ funding. Even at this slightly increased level, USAID's LGBTQI+ program is the smallest docket of any thematic program in the building. As such, USAID's LGBTQI+ program face the same challenges as the GEF, as they receive significantly more requests for funds than they have available. For example, the Human Rights Grants Programs alone receives proposals estimated to total up to \$10 million. In a July 2021 House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, Administrator Power recognized that USAID's LGBTQI+ programs were only able to fund roughly one-sixth of the proposals they received from missions.

Additional funding for USAID's LGBTQI+ rights programs would enable to the agency to not only develop LGBTQI+ inclusive trainings across agency programs to break down silos, but to also increase its investments in civil society organizations. This includes increased funding for emergency response efforts through the Human Rights Support Mechanism, as well as developing a stronger public-private partnership with intermediary funders through a Global Development Alliance.

**Given USAID LGBTQI+ funding demands and capacity, we request OMB include \$30 million for the Inclusive Development Hub's Protection of LGBTQI+ Persons.** We also encourage the administration to ensure that all USAID programs are inclusive of LGBTQI+ populations, including humanitarian and COVID-19 relief efforts.

As you consider your budget for FY 2023, we hope you will make these crucial investments in LGBTQI+ human rights that help to make our world safer and more secure for all its citizens, no matter who they are or whom they love. We welcome the Biden-Harris Administration's commitments to global LGBTQI+ rights and look forward to opportunities to advance them together.

Sincerely,

1. Advocates for Youth
2. ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal
3. Ameinu
4. American Jewish World Service
5. amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research
6. Amnesty International USA
7. Arizona Jews for Justice
8. Athlete Ally
9. AVAC
10. Carolina Jews for Justice
11. Catholics for Choice
12. Center for American Progress
13. Center for Biological Diversity
14. Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research (CLEAR)
15. Center for Reproductive Rights
16. CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
17. Church World Service
18. Coastal Roots Farm

19. Council for Global Equality
20. Equality California
21. Family Equality
22. Fenway Institute
23. FORGE, Inc.
24. Friends Committee on National Legislation
25. Friends of UNFPA
26. GLAAD
27. Global Fund for Women
28. Global Justice Center
29. GLSEN
30. Guttmacher Institute
31. Health GAP
32. Heartland Alliance International
33. Human Rights Campaign
34. Human Rights First
35. Immigration Equality
36. interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth
37. International Association of Providers of AIDS Care
38. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
39. International Community of Women Living with HIV North America
40. International Planned Parenthood Federation Western Hemisphere Region (IPPFWHR)
41. Ipas
42. Jewish Council for Public Affairs
43. Jewish World Watch
44. Keshet
45. Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute
46. LGBTQ Victory Institute
47. Los Angeles LGBT Center
48. Management Sciences for Health
49. Modern Military Association of America
50. MPact: Global Action for Gay Health & Rights
51. NARAL Pro-Choice America
52. National Birth Equity Collaborative
53. National Center for Lesbian Rights
54. National Center for Transgender Equality
55. National Council of Jewish Women
56. National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC)
57. New York Jewish Agenda
58. Oasis Legal Services
59. OutRight Action International
60. PAI
61. PFLAG National
62. Planned Parenthood Federation of America
63. Population Connection Action Fund
64. Population Institute
65. Presbyterian Church (USA)
66. Rabbinical Assembly
67. Rainbow Railroad
68. Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
69. Robert F Kennedy Human Rights

70. Synergia - Initiatives for Human Rights
71. The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, Global Office
72. The Global Justice Institute
73. The Trevor Project
74. The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
75. The Workers Circle
76. Tivnu: Building Justice
77. U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus
78. Union for Reform Judaism
79. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
80. Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice
81. Washington Office on Latin America
82. White Ribbon Alliance
83. Women Deliver
84. Women's Refugee Commission
85. Woodhull Freedom Foundation