



human rights *first*

American ideals. Universal values.

April 17, 2017

The Honorable Nikki Haley
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017-3505

Dear Ambassador Haley:

I am writing to express alarm over the ongoing persecution of gay men in Chechnya, Russia, and to call for U.S. leadership at the United Nations in pressing for accountability for these egregious violations of human rights. I urge you to work with U.S. allies at the United Nations to develop a comprehensive response, and engage with your Russian counterparts to ensure a thorough investigation of the acts and justice for the victims.

Independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* recently reported the detention of more than one hundred gay men by Chechen authorities “in connection with their nontraditional sexual orientation, or suspicion of such.” The newspaper reported that three of the men detained have since been killed, and that the death toll may be even higher. Additional reports have confirmed these basic facts. Survivors reported enduring beatings and torture, as well as being forced to disclose the names of other gay men in the region. To date, the violence and persecution continues, and LGBT organizations on the ground are working tirelessly to evacuate victims and call for accountability.

A spokesperson for Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya’s brutal leader and a man known as “Putin’s dragon,” described the reports of detention and abuse as “absolute lies and disinformation.” He denied the existence of LGBT people in the region and alluded to so-called “honor killings” of LGBT people, saying, “if such people existed in Chechnya, law enforcement would not have to worry about them, as their own relatives would have sent them to where they could never return.” President Putin’s spokesperson questioned the veracity of the reports, describing them as “a question for law enforcement” and “not on the Kremlin’s agenda.”

I commend the strong repudiation of these acts by the U.S. Department of State, which categorically condemned “the persecution of individuals based on their sexual orientation or any other basis.” During your confirmation hearing, you similarly affirmed that “every person deserves decency and respect,” and stated your commitment to fighting discrimination. Just last month, you highlighted the need to integrate human rights issues into the agenda of the U.N. Security Council, recognizing that “peace and security cannot be achieved in isolation from human rights.” I could not agree more.

Indeed, Russia’s egregious human rights violations extend beyond its borders, and you have rightly condemned the Kremlin’s complicity in the Assad regime’s brutal violations against its own citizens. In Syria, Russia, and around the world, we have witnessed the evident link between violent repression and instability.

The protection of the most vulnerable is key to advancing human rights for all citizens, and to securing stability, peace, and prosperity. A comprehensive international response to the situation in Chechnya is crucial to asserting the international community's values and advancing human rights. I strongly support your initiative to use the U.S. presidency of the U.N. Security Council to advance international thinking on the clear links between upholding universal values and the maintenance of international peace and security, and hope that you will use this effort to call attention to an ongoing outrage that has no place in the modern world.

I thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to engaging further as you grapple with today's most pressing global issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisa Massimino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elisa Massimino
President and CEO