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Members of the House Democratic Caucus
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Caucus Members:

The undersigned members of the Council for Global Equality* support strong engagement by the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) in guiding development and oversight of a progressive, principled, rights-driven foreign policy that includes urgently needed attention to the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people abroad. We ask that discussions for the selection of a new HFAC Chair include specific attention to the candidates' support for LGBTIQ+ equality at home and abroad, and that the eventual Chair's priorities demonstrate commitment to the following principles:

That America's commitment to advancing democratic and human rights precepts must be restored and must be pursued in partnership with other like-minded allies. America's national security and other interests are best served when other countries share its commitment to

*The Council for Global Equality (www.GlobalEquality.org) is a coalition of human rights and LGBTI advocacy organizations that together seek strong and consistent U.S. support for fairness toward LGBTI people worldwide. The Council seeks to partner with the U.S. government in support of fundamental freedoms for all people and has worked closely with the State Department and the U.S. Congress on global LGBTI policies over many years.

transparency and good governance, civil society inclusion, the expansion of fundamental freedoms, and the highest standards of protection for human rights. We hope the Committee's Chair will support international partnership to these ends, including through restored membership in both the UN Human Rights Council and WHO. The Chair should decry efforts by Secretary Pompeo's Commission on Unalienable Rights to narrow our country's human rights focus; must work to place religious freedom more holistically within a balanced understanding of fundamental freedoms that undergird this country; and commit to pressing the Administration to join with other like-minded countries in blunting the subversive impact of white nationalist and anti-gender ideology groups on democracy and international cohesion.

That our country's foreign policy must embrace LGBTIQ+- and gender-inclusive human rights. We ask that the next Chair pledge to reverse Trump Administration erosion of Congressionally-mandated annual Human Rights Reports and return to robust reporting on the full range of human rights abuses experienced by LGBTIQ+ communities globally. This encompasses sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence, and anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination and violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, including forced anal exams and conversion therapy. The Chair should co-sponsor and be committed to speedy passage of the Greater Leadership Overseas for the Benefit of Equality (GLOBE) Act, aimed at ensuring that LGBTIQ+ and other marginalized communities are included in U.S. foreign assistance, rule of law, civil society, public diplomacy, and health and reproductive services policies. The Chair should pledge to press the new Administration to renew participation in the Equal Rights Coalition and in LGBTIQ+-supportive working groups at the UN and in regional organizations. The Chair also should be committed to overturning the "Global Gag Rule" that denies rights to reproductive health and choice; to supporting the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which repeals the harmful Helms Amendment limiting LGBTIQ+ peoples' access to comprehensive reproductive health services; to pressing the Administration to reverse recent U.S. positions in multilateral fora prohibiting use of the term "gender"; to recognizing through Committee hearings and resolutions that sexual rights are human rights; and to bringing overdue attention to the plight of transgender individuals around the globe.

That LGBTIQ+-inclusive immigration and asylum policies must be strengthened. We ask the Caucus to choose as Chair an individual determined that immigration and asylum be reopened to those in need, including vulnerable LGBTIQ+ populations abroad. The Chair should examine in Committee the myriad policies and regulations implemented by the Trump administration that hinder access to asylum for LGBTIQ+ and other asylum seekers, including the Migrant Protection Protocols, the Asylum Cooperative Agreements with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, the CDC regulation empowering CBP to close the border to most asylum seekers based on the pretext of Covid-19, expedited asylum review procedures that severely limit access to legal representation and lack meaningful due process, and the series of regulations issued in 2020 that impose new obstacles on asylum seekers and narrow established interpretations of the refugee definition. We further ask that the Chair raise concerns about the plight of LGBTIQ+ refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants fleeing the Northern Triangle region and be committed to restoring the rule of law in that region. The Chair also should seek to minimize the use of immigration detention for asylum seekers and migrants and ensure that Covid-19 vulnerabilities are properly managed in immigration detention and at the southern border.

That our development and health assistance programs must holistically incorporate LGBTIQ+ populations. The new Chair should unambiguously advocate the full inclusion of

LGBTIQ+ communities in U.S. development and healthcare programs abroad. We urge that the Chair demonstrate full support for government-wide adherence to non-discrimination in employment and service delivery, including among non-governmental entities contracted to implement federal foreign affairs agency tasks abroad; be committed to investigating barriers to healthcare services in all global health programs (including Covid-19, HIV prevention and treatment, and reproductive health programs); endorse LGBTIQ+ inclusion in poverty-alleviation assistance strategies; and be on record as supporting repeal of the anti-prostitution loyalty oath from PEPFAR, which creates barriers to health and human rights for sex workers.

That the Administration’s public servants must be representative of America’s diversity.

We urge that the new Chair commit to using Committee time and resources to examine the hiring, retention and promotion of LGBTIQ+ and other minority-community individuals at the Department of State, USAID and other foreign affairs agencies, and to investigating the Department of State’s efforts to ensure that LGBTIQ+ diplomats and their families receive the support needed to enable their world-wide availability representing our country abroad.

That the Committee’s oversight functions must be marshalled to ensure the effectiveness of our human rights policies and programs.

Finally, we urge that the Chair commit to a series of hearings on the effectiveness both of our human rights tools and our development investments in promoting the rights of LGBTIQ+ communities abroad. The last time – indeed the *only* time – the Committee invited testimony on global trends in LGBTIQ+ rights was in July 2016, as part of a broader hearing on “Global Human Rights Under Siege.” The Committee must examine what we have accomplished to date through our diplomatic and development investments and what is needed to respond effectively to the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals in hostile or criminalized country contexts. The new Chair also should commit to the robust use of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee to ensure that faith-based organizations implementing USAID or other government-funded services are not discriminating against LGBTIQ+ individuals in employment or service delivery and that religious exemptions for faith-based organizations are not improperly disadvantaging LGBTIQ+ individuals in accessing services. The Committee should similarly review USAID’s recent draft of the 2020 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy, which deleted references to sexual orientation, gender identity, reproductive health, and human rights.

We would welcome discussing these issues with you further and are committed to partnering with you toward their advancement.

Sincerely,

Council for Global Equality
Advocates for Youth
American Jewish World Service
Amnesty International – USA

Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights