



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOT)

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 12, 2016

On May 17, we will mark the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. This occasion is a call to stand up for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals across the world and reaffirm our commitment to the equality and dignity of all people.

The human rights of all persons are fundamental and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Principle Seven of the Helsinki Final Act speaks to the inherent dignity of the human person. At the 2007 Madrid Ministerial, OSCE participating States recognized “the importance of taking a comprehensive approach...to effectively combat all forms of discrimination.” The United States is dedicated to eliminating barriers to equality, and fighting discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

In February 2015, Randy Berry was appointed the State Department’s first Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI persons. Since then, Mr. Berry has traveled to over 42 countries and met with a wide spectrum of governments, international organizations, and civil society leaders. He has cemented relationships with the business sector and faith communities.

As the United States deepens its relationships with governments, civil society organizations, businesses, and faith communities to promote respect for the human rights of LGBTI individuals, we will focus on three priority areas:

First, we will redouble our effort to reduce violence targeting LGBTI persons.

Second, we will work to institutionalize our relationship with businesses, with the goal of building a forum where businesses and government can work together to advance values of non-discrimination.

Third, we will work to strengthen the global consensus in support of the human rights of LGBTI persons. In this regard, we look forward to joining other governments in Montevideo, Uruguay in July, at the Global LGBTI Human Rights Conference co-hosted by the Netherlands and Uruguay. We support the idea of launching a new coalition of like-minded governments at the conference.

While some participating States have made tremendous progress in advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms, LGBTI persons in far too many countries in the OSCE region face discriminatory laws and practices that attack their dignity, undermine their safety, and abuse their human rights. We have seen how some governments use LGBTI issues as a political wedge, and pass or otherwise pursue draconian laws that undermine human rights for LGBTI individuals, thereby undermining the rights of all and—in some cases—further contributing to negative societal attitudes that drive increases in violence against members of LGBTI communities. We have also seen how violence tears at the fabric of communities; LGBTI people sometimes are forced to flee their homes and countries, seeking safe refuge elsewhere.

Let me also update on our own continuing work to form a more perfect union at home. On May 9, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against the state of North Carolina alleging that it is discriminating against transgender individuals in violation of federal law. U.S. Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch said, “This action . . . is about the dignity and respect we accord our fellow citizens, and the laws that we, as a people and as a country, have enacted to protect them – indeed, to protect all of us. And it is about the founding ideals that have led this country – haltingly but inexorably – in the direction of fairness, inclusion, and equality for all Americans.... [T]his is not a time to act out of fear. This is a time to summon our national virtues of inclusivity, diversity, compassion, and open-mindedness. What we must not do – what we must never do – is turn on our neighbors, our family members, our fellow Americans, for something they cannot control, and deny what makes them human.”

Mr. Chair, the United States will continue to promote the rights of members of the LGBTI community at home, throughout the OSCE region, and around the world. We will continue to speak out against marginalization and persecution of LGBTI individuals and their families. And we will keep moving forward toward our shared goal of justice and equality for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.