

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 31, 2014

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write to urge you to ensure that human rights and specifically the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people are made a focus of the agenda of the first ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit. This summit, which will be held in Washington, DC next month, will be the largest single engagement by any U.S. president with Africa and a historic opportunity for the United States and the African continent to strengthen ties, build lasting relationships, and highlight America's continued commitment to investment in Africa. Also, and just as importantly, it is a chance for the United States to underscore our commitment to strengthening international human rights.

Under your leadership, and with strong commitments from Secretaries Clinton and Kerry at the State Department, our country has demonstrated that we stand for justice and equality. As former Secretary Clinton proclaimed at the United Nations, "gay rights are human rights." The rights of all LGBT individuals must be protected no matter where they live around the world.

Unfortunately, a number of countries have recently passed laws that criminalize homosexuality and severely limit the rights of individuals to peaceably assemble. In particular, we have seen a systematic targeting of LGBT Africans, most egregiously in Uganda and Nigeria. In an already challenging environment, these laws are further marginalizing LGBT citizens, forcing them deeper into the shadows. Many individuals have already been arrested simply for being who they are.

Such discrimination is intolerable. That is why we strongly support the International Human Rights Defense Act of 2014, a bill that would build an unprecedented framework into U.S. diplomacy to protect LGBT rights worldwide and would, among other things, create a Special Envoy within the U.S. State Department who would serve as principal advisor to the Secretary of State on LGBT issues.

To be sure, these concerns extend beyond the continent of Africa, with several countries around the world recently targeting their LGBT citizens for discriminatory treatment. However, this historic gathering will serve as an opportunity to stress the importance of human rights protections at a time when we see a backsliding of LGBT protections internationally. It also provides an opportunity to make clear that the persecution of LGBT individuals is bad for business and undermines investment in Africa. This is why we request that this summit be used

as an opportunity to address the importance of advancing human rights for LGBT citizens throughout the world.

Thank you for all that you have done for human rights, and we look forward to working with you on this subject in the days ahead.

Sincerely,



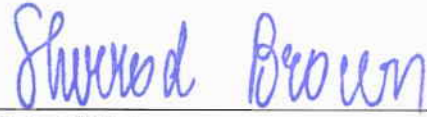
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



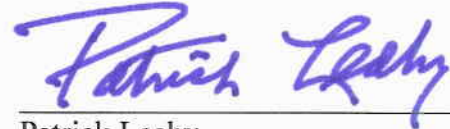
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



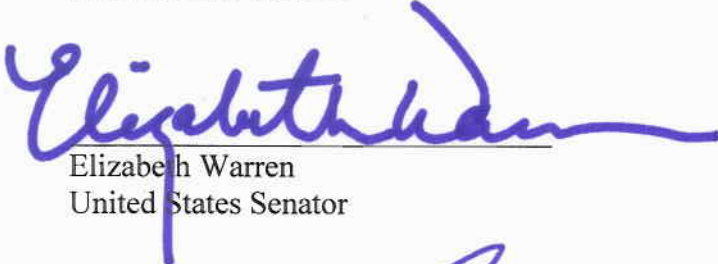
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



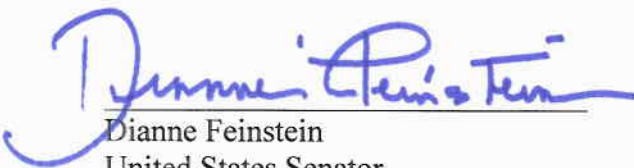
Bob Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



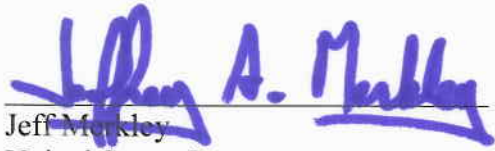
Bernie Sanders
United States Senator



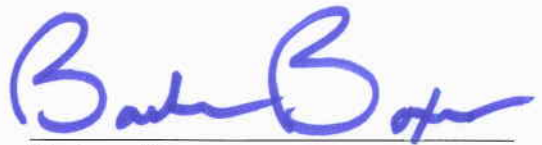
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



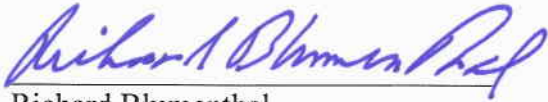
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



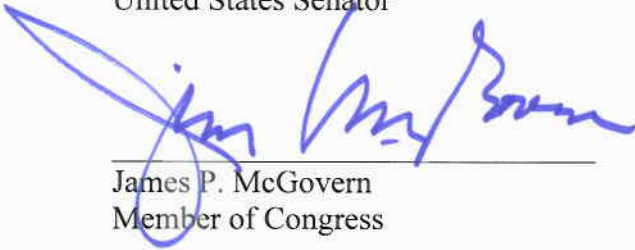
Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senator



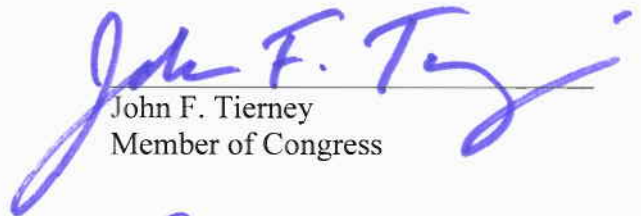
Patty Murray
United States Senator



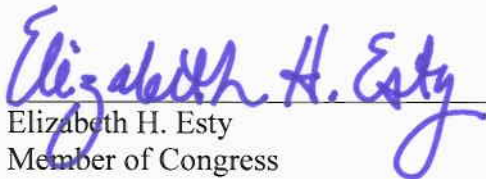
Al Franken
United States Senator




James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



John F. Tierney
Member of Congress



Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress



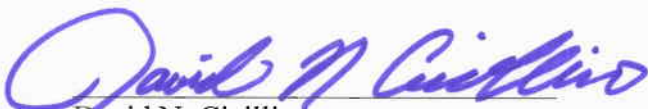
Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Terrol Nadler
Member of Congress



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



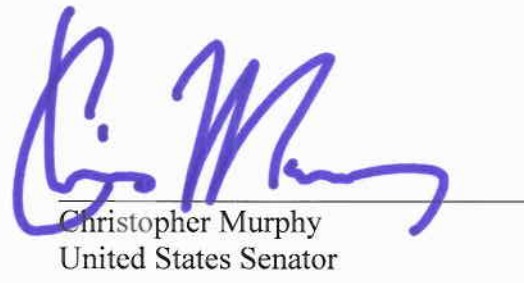
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Christopher Murphy
United States Senator