

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 7, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State  
Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20520

The Honorable John Barsa, Acting Administrator  
USAID  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington DC 20523

Dear Mr. Secretary and Acting Administrator Barsa:

Evidence suggests the COVID-19 pandemic is having disproportionate impacts on marginalized populations around the globe. **How our government responds will be seen as a test of our country's commitment to the protection of human rights and American values of fairness and equality.** As members of Congress concerned with the plight of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) individuals abroad, we ask the Administration to take the following steps, on an urgent basis, to reaffirm American support for the protection of human rights worldwide as our country responds to the crisis:

1. **Intervene at senior levels with governments that are using the COVID-19 crisis to persecute or discriminate against LGBTQI and other marginalized communities.** Many governments are using the pandemic as an excuse to restrict fundamental human rights. We trust that you and other officials will express concern about these problematic exercises of government power. In that context, we ask that you specifically note instances in which COVID-19 restrictions are being used to further marginalize and criminalize LGBTQI individuals and communities. For example, Ugandan authorities raided a homeless youth shelter in March, arresting 19 LGBTQI people and charging them with “a negligent act likely to spread infection of disease” simply for living in a shelter; and those arrested have been denied access to legal services. We understand that this case, documented by Human Rights Watch and other non-profit organizations, has been shared with your Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). *We ask that you urge foreign ministers and other officials to ensure that their COVID-19-related responses respect individual liberties and democratic rights.*
  
2. **Guarantee the inclusion of LGBTQI populations in short- and long-term response and recovery programming and urge international partners to adopt a parallel approach.** Due to stigma, discrimination, and harassment, many LGBTQI individuals and other vulnerable populations are forced to support themselves and their families through the informal economy. Restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 have placed a large burden on those in the informal economy, cutting off income streams and preventing them from obtaining food or secure shelter.

As a result, the pandemic has heightened the vulnerability of LGBTQI and other marginalized populations to poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness. At the same time, some governments, as documented in Panama and in Bogotá, Colombia, are using gender to determine when citizens are allowed to leave their homes for essential services such as shopping for food, resulting in arbitrary arrests of trans and gender non-conforming people and harassment and discrimination by police, security guards, and private businesses. We ask that you encourage Ambassadors, in their dialogue with host governments, to raise the importance of ensuring that all segments of society are considered in efforts to respond to this global pandemic, and that policies include clear statements of non-discrimination.

- 3. Support measures to ensure safe, healthy, and sustained access to health services, including treatment for HIV and other COVID-exacerbating conditions, as well as other necessary healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health.** Globally, LGBTQI people face higher rates of underlying health conditions that have been shown to exacerbate the mortality rate of COVID-19. Gay and bisexual men and transgender women also face higher rates of HIV, requiring long-term treatment and care. In many cases, restrictions on movement and the reduction of public transportation in countries around the world have limited access to HIV treatment and prevention services and other necessary health services, including sexual and reproductive health care. Criminalization of HIV transmission, including in Poland where additional criminal sanctions were recently added for HIV transmission as part of a COVID response, also inhibit people from seeking critical care. In addition to these barriers, LGBTQI people and other vulnerable populations face stigma and discrimination in obtaining healthcare services, especially in countries where same-sex sexual conduct or non-normative gender expression is criminalized. This hinders access to lifesaving healthcare services and puts their lives at even greater risk during this pandemic. We ask that you ensure that U.S.-provided global health programming, including delivery of health-related goods and services, is carried out in a non-discriminatory manner promoting respect for the most vulnerable, including LGBTQI people; and that State Department and USAID representatives actively encourage foreign counterparts to do the same.

We appreciate the attention of the Department and USAID to the unprecedented challenge ahead of us, and we urge you to seize this critical moment to reaffirm inclusive U.S. values.

Sincerely,



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Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

**Also signed by:**

/s/

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

/s/

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/

Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

/s/

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

/s/

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/

Andy Levin  
Member of Congress

/s/

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/

Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress

/s/

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

/s/

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

/s/

Jim Costa  
Member of Congress

/s/

Linda T. Sánchez  
Member of Congress

/s/

Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

/s/

Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress

/s/

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

/s/

Eliot L. Engel  
Member of Congress

/s/

David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress

/s/

Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress

/s/

Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress

/s/

Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress

/s/

Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress

/s/

Darren Soto  
Member of Congress

/s/

Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress

/s/

Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

/s/

Albio Sires  
Member of Congress

/s/

Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

/s/

Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

/s/

Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress

/s/

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

/s/

David E. Price  
Member of Congress

/s/

David Trone  
Member of Congress

/s/

Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

/s/

Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

/s/  
William R. Keating  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

/s/  
André Carson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

/s/  
John Yarmuth  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Nita M. Lowey  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress