



American ideals. Universal values.

June 29, 2016

Ambassador Keith Harper  
U.S. Representative to the U.N. Human Rights Council  
U.S. Mission to the European Office of the U.N.  
Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20521-5120

Dear Ambassador Harper:

I am writing to express Human Rights First's support as you work to reaffirm human rights on two upcoming votes at the U.N. Human Rights Council. I want to first underscore our support for the creation of the position of U.N. Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. I also want to highlight our support for the renewal of the mandate of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus.

Around the world, many activists and organizations have united around the call for the creation of the Independent Expert position to ensure that the concerns faced by LGBT people internationally continue to be an essential part of the international human rights dialogue. We recently returned from El Salvador, where LGBT activists underscored the importance of the mandate. They expressed hope that the United States would engage with the El Salvador delegation and other country delegations in order to garner support for the position's creation.

The success of the State Department Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons, who has visited over 40 countries and engaged in dialogue with both government and civil society actors around the world, could provide an important example of the potential impact of a U.N. position. In the wake of the recent tragic events in Orlando, it is also pressing that the United States' dialogue with other delegations on support for the position include our own shortcomings regarding the human rights of LGBT people and highlight how the United States could benefit from the expertise of the appointee.

I would also like to highlight our support for the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. In his recent report, the Special Rapporteur cited a "lack of significant change in the entrenched oppressive laws and practices" in the country. In this human rights context, we are particularly concerned about a new law that could be interpreted to infringe on the rights of LGBT Belarusians. While the law does not mention terms such as 'homosexuality,' the sections of concern ban information that "encourages habits contradicting the development of a healthy lifestyle" and/or "that discredits the institution of the family and marriage." It is possible that officials could interpret this language in ways that would infringe on the rights of LGBT individuals.

Thank you for your leadership on these pressing human rights issues. Please let me know if we can assist you as you engage with your counterparts to advance human rights around the world.

Regards,

Shawn Gaylord  
Advocacy Counsel

1/1

75 Broad Street, 31st Floor  
New York, NY 10004

Tel: 212.845.5200  
Fax: 212.845.5299

[humanrightsfirst.org](http://humanrightsfirst.org)

805 15th Street, N.W., #900  
Washington, DC 20005

Tel: 202.547.5692  
Fax: 202.543.5999

1303 San Jacinto Street, 9th Floor  
at South Texas College of Law, Houston, TX 77002

Tel: 713.955.1360  
Fax: 713.510.1935