

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 21, 2010

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write to raise serious concerns about a grave injustice occurring in Uganda and other countries that are taking steps to criminalize or otherwise severely discriminate against their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities. We consider this to be an international human rights issue, requiring a strong response by you and the United States.

As you are aware, Ugandan Parliamentarian David Bahati recently introduced draconian legislation in Uganda outlawing homosexuality and making "any form of sexual relations between persons of the same sex" punishable by prison or even death. Late last month, the Rwandan Parliament debated but then halted plans to pass a draft revision of their penal code that would have, for the first time, made homosexuality a crime in Rwanda. Burundi has recently added a criminal provision, again in a country where consensual conduct was not previously criminalized. These global anti-equality efforts are not in keeping with international human rights precepts, nor are they consistent with your March 2009 endorsement of calls at the United Nations to decriminalize homosexuality worldwide. For these reasons, Mr. President, we ask you to demonstrate your personal leadership, and that of our country, in seeking to deter these legislative proposals that would legalize hate in countries with which we have bilateral partnerships.

The Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2009 is by far the most extreme and hateful attempt by an African country to criminalize the LGBT community. It would increase the penalty for "same sex sexual acts" to life in prison, limit the distribution of information on HIV through a provision criminalizing the "promotion of homosexuality," and establish the crime of "aggravated homosexuality" punishable by death for anyone in Uganda who is HIV positive and has consensual same-sex relations. Further, the bill includes a provision that could lead to the imprisonment for up to three years of anyone who fails to report within 24 hours the identities of everyone they know who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or who supports human rights for people who are, to the government.

This reprehensible bill is not only unjust on its face: Its mere existence could provoke or legitimize violence against individuals who either are LGBT or are rumored to be LGBT, their families, and community leaders in their places of worship, residence, school, or place of business. The Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2009 even establishes extra-territorial jurisdiction which consequently endangers known LGBT citizens living abroad who may be extradited and prosecuted in Uganda.

Mr. President, we applaud Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's recent statement of concern about Uganda's pending legislation. We concur with her fear that the bill would create fear, promote hatred, and potentially divide communities. We take at face value her statement that the U.S. has urged Uganda to take all necessary measures to ensure that sexual orientation or gender identity may under no circumstances be the basis for criminal penalties, harassment, or discrimination. We also applaud the recent White House statement indicating your opposition to the proposed Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda.

However, we strongly believe that the severity of the legislation under consideration in both Uganda and Rwanda requires that you do more. Sweden has indicated that it will cut bilateral assistance to Uganda should the bill be passed. Canada and the United Kingdom also have condemned the bill, and Prime Minister Gordon Brown took up the matter directly with Ugandan President Museveni at the recent Commonwealth Summit. We ask that you use all means available to seek to deter these bills from passage, and that a tangible and meaningful bilateral response be undertaken should either bill be passed into law.


Specifically, we ask that you speak out publicly against this proposed legislation to bring further attention to the issue. Also, given your popularity in Africa, speaking out publicly against Uganda and Rwanda's proposed anti-homosexual legislation is likely to garner more concern and attention from not only African nations but internationally. We further ask that you give diplomatic weight to your call for homosexuality to be decriminalized worldwide. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties prohibit discrimination and specify that all enjoy the right to privacy, over 80 countries currently have in place sodomy laws or other legal provisions that criminalize the LGBT community. We believe that standing up for the rights of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, reflects the fundamental precepts of our country. We would be pleased to learn what efforts you and your Administration have undertaken since March 2009 to help move other countries toward fully protecting the rights of all their citizens.

We are reaching out to you not only as our President, but as a close ally in the struggle to fight for the human rights of vulnerable minorities. Like you, we believe that human rights violations of any kind should not be tolerated, and the threatened persecution of the LGBT community in Uganda and around the world is unacceptable. As an international leader, the United States has an opportunity to prevent proliferation of hate, civil unrest and violence in Uganda, Rwanda, and other countries considering these devastating policies. We respectfully ask for your immediate and consequential help in addressing these grave dangers.

Yours truly,



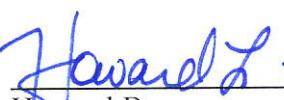
Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Barney Frank
Member of Congress



Howard Berman
Member of Congress

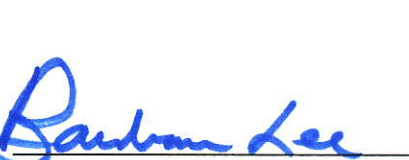


Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress





Donald Payne
Member of Congress


Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress


Barbara Lee
Member of Congress


Peter Welch
Member of Congress


Linda Sanchez
Member of Congress

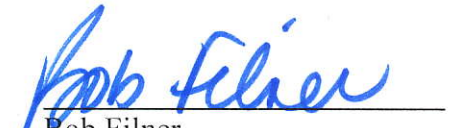

Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress

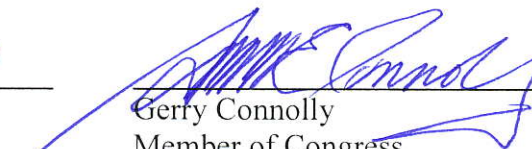

Mary Jo Kilroy
Member of Congress


Rosa DeLauro
Member of Congress


Jim Oberstar
Member of Congress


Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

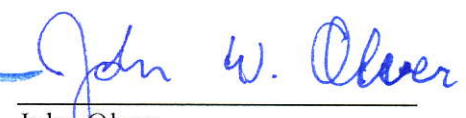

Bob Filner
Member of Congress



Gerry Connolly
Member of Congress

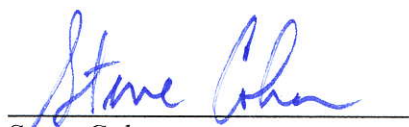

Diane Watson
Member of Congress

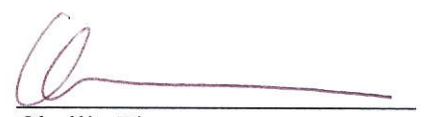

John Garamendi
Member of Congress


Steve Israel
Member of Congress

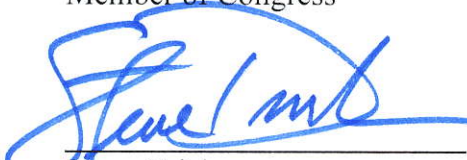

John Olver
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

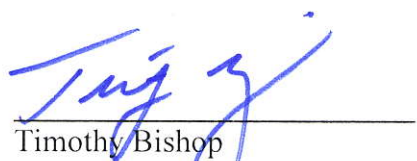

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress


Maurice Hinchey
Member of Congress

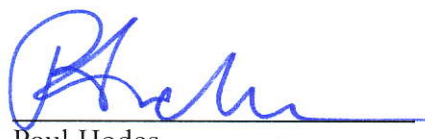

Steve Driehaus
Member of Congress


Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

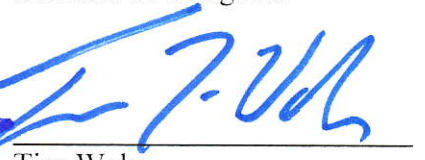

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress


Timothy Bishop
Member of Congress


Hank Johnson
Member of Congress


Paul Hodes
Member of Congress


Elijah Cummings
Member of Congress


Tim Walz
Member of Congress

Michael E Capuano
Michael Capuano
Member of Congress

David Wu
David Wu
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Michael M Honda
Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress

Lois Capps
Lois Capps
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Robert Brady
Robert Brady
Member of Congress

Mike Doyle
Mike Doyle
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Alcee Hastings
Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress

Carolyn Maloney
Carolyn Maloney
Member of Congress

Bill Delahunt
Bill Delahunt
Member of Congress

Charles Gonzalez
Charles Gonzalez
Member of Congress

James Moran
James Moran
Member of Congress

George Miller
George Miller
Member of Congress

Joseph Crowley
Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

Anthony Weiner
Anthony Weiner
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Rush Holt
Rush Holt
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Steven R. Rothman
Steven R. Rothman
Member of Congress

Eliot Engel
Eliot Engel
Member of Congress

Anna Eshoo
Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone Jr.
Frank Pallone
Member of Congress

John Hall
John Hall
Member of Congress

Brian Baird
Brian Baird
Member of Congress

David Price

David Price
Member of Congress

Jim McDermott Ed Pastor

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

Ed Pastor
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Albio Sires

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Jim Langevin

Jim Langevin
Member of Congress

Carol Shea-Porter

Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress

Bart Gordon Tom Perriello

Bart Gordon
Member of Congress

Tom Perriello
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell

Bill Pascrell
Member of Congress

Sander Levin

Sander Levin
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Fortney Pete Stark

Fortney Pete Stark
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Yvette Clarke

Yvette Clarke
Member of Congress

Patrick Kennedy

Patrick Kennedy
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Gary Peters

Gary Peters
Member of Congress

Madeleine Bordallo

Madeleine Bordallo
Member of Congress

Dennis Kucinich

Dennis Kucinich
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Joe Sestak

Joe Sestak
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Laura Richardson

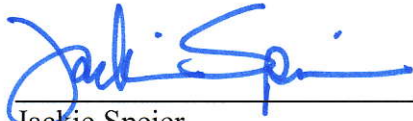
Laura Richardson
Member of Congress

Henry Waxman

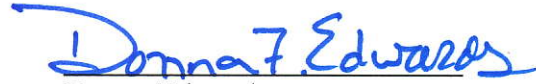
Henry Waxman
Member of Congress



Phil Hare
Member of Congress



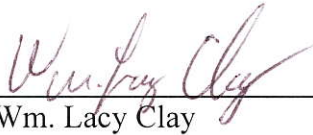
Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Donna Edwards
Member of Congress



Judy Biggert
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



Martin Heinrich
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress