

July 22, 2022

Secretary Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
United States Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, DC 20523

CC: Jessica Stern, Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) Persons

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power,

We gathered last month to celebrate Pride and the progress made by LGBTQI+ communities worldwide, but the commemorations took on new weight and an unmistakable urgency as the month progressed. From the tragic attacks on Pride in Norway to the U.S. Supreme Court's assault on bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom, last month provided a sobering reminder that the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals are still very much under threat in the United States and around the world.

In Latin America in particular, a region with close connections to the United States, we see rising rates of anti-LGBTQI+ violence, discrimination, and legislative restrictions that threaten LGBTQI+ advocates' hard-won progress and the protection of human rights. As such, we are writing with urgency to call on the State Department and USAID to use all available opportunities to surge funding to local LGBTQI-led organizations, target diplomatic engagement, and provide lifesaving refugee protection in the region. Protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ communities throughout Latin America is essential to strengthening democratic institutions, increasing cooperation between states in the Western Hemisphere, and reducing the harm LGBTQI+ people face.

Despite significant advancements in parts of Latin America, [major obstacles remain](#). Several countries in the Caribbean continue to criminalize same-sex relationships; transgender individuals cannot change their gender markers on identification documents in many countries, and the process is procedurally burdensome even if technically possible in many others; and anti-LGBTQI+ violence is endemic and rarely investigated or prosecuted across much of the region. Furthermore, trans people experience a disproportionate rate of violence in Latin America, with 311 transgender people [murdered](#) in the region from 2020 to 2021. Efforts to address these concerns are essential to the prevention of violence and the protection of human rights.

In [Central America](#), the situation is particularly acute. Members of the LGBTQI+ community live in fear and many have fled the region to seek protection abroad. More than half of all LGBTQI+ asylum seekers at the United States border come from the [Northern Triangle region](#) of Central America: El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. And a [recent study](#) found that 33 percent of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers from Honduras suffered torture or ill treatment while fleeing to the United States. Lesbian and transgender persons are particularly vulnerable to violence by local authorities, gangs, and fellow migrants during their migration journey and while in U.S. immigration detention after they arrive.

We are grateful for the Administration's commitment to LGBTQI+ rights abroad, as outlined in the "Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World" and believe more can be done to address the ongoing obstacles to equality in Latin America. We ask that both the State Department and USAID prioritize direct investments in local, LGBTQI+-led organizations in Latin America, including through the implementation of *Centroamérica Local*. LGBTQI+-led organizations are [best placed to provide direct services](#) to those in their own community, but they also are best situated to develop and lead necessary policy and legal reforms that center LGBTQI+ communities within democratic reforms. The closing of civic space in countries like Guatemala and El Salvador, as evidenced by legislation restricting the activities of civil society organizations, has a heightened impact on organizations defending the rights of marginalized communities such as LGBTQI+ organizations.

Funding should include targeted support for initiatives to combat impunity by strengthening the investigation and prosecution of crimes against the LGBTQI+ community. These efforts should focus on the needs and priorities of the community and not just on the needs of law enforcement. Similar investments should promote self-determined gender-identity recognition for transgender individuals across the region as an urgent means of rights protection and violence prevention.

Additional diplomatic engagement is also essential, and additional opportunities should be prioritized to deploy senior-level U.S. government officials to the region to develop a region-wide LGBTQI+ strategy, including but not limited to diplomatic missions by the U.S. Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons and the USAID Senior Coordinator for LGBTQI+ Issues.

Finally, immediate steps must be taken to address the needs of LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers. As LGBTQI+ migrants are particularly vulnerable to extortion, assault, and discrimination in flight, special emphasis should be placed on expanding opportunities for timely refugee processing in the region by accredited civil society and international organizations so that fewer individuals are forced to make the dangerous journey to the U.S.-Mexico border and on halting U.S. policies, like Title 42, that turn away and expel asylum seekers, including LGBTQI+ migrants, to further halt human rights violations in Mexico. Programs like the Protection Transfer Agreement and urgent refugee resettlement programs that prioritize protection of those at increased risk should be supported and expanded. And as the State Department engages with countries in the region on migration issues, including through new bilateral agreements and the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, which was

signed by 21 countries in the context of the Summit of the Americas last month, we ask that you prioritize the treatment and protection of LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers.

We appreciate the United States government's continued support of LGBTQI+ rights both domestically and abroad. We will continue to support your efforts in Congress and look forward to hearing from you on these issues.

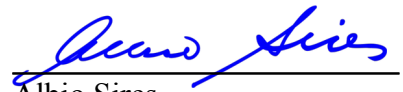
Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



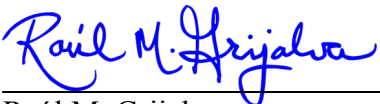
Albio Sires
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Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



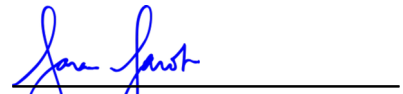
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Juan Vargas
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Carolyn B. Maloney
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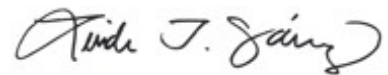
Ted W. Lieu
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Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Adriano Espaillat
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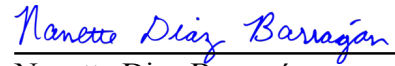
André Carson
Member of Congress



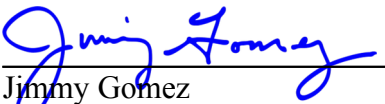
Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



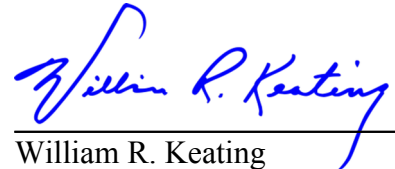
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
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