



July 25, 2014

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write to encourage robust civil society participation in the upcoming U.S.- Africa Leaders Summit, and in keeping with the theme of the Summit, “Investing in the Next Generation,” we urge particular attention to the rights and opportunities of the next generation of Africans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT).

Unfortunately, across much of the African continent today, the contributions of LGBT communities are denied or denigrated; their relationships and organizations are criminalized; and hostile political rhetoric seeks to deny their rightful place in African society. In the face of this repression, civil society leaders are standing up and demanding full citizenship. These brave voices are demanding a better future for all citizens of Africa, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and the Summit provides an unprecedented opportunity to showcase their investments in human dignity.

Given how some African governments deny the rights of their LGBT citizens, and the unique role that civil society plays in defending those rights, we urge you to include civil society voices in the official meeting of African leaders during the Summit. We welcome the opportunity for civil society to convene at a forum two days before the leadership meeting, but that forum is not an adequate substitute for civil society participation in the high-level dialogue with heads of state. Recognizing the need for candid discussion at the leadership meeting, we nonetheless believe that civil society participation could be structured to stimulate dialogue without necessarily limiting honest diplomatic exchange. To the contrary, participation by civil society in some portion of the leadership meeting would send a powerful message about the values we place on democratic participation and civic engagement in our own country.

We are confident that with your support, and the robust contribution of civil society, the Summit will provide a unique opportunity to emphasize that LGBT and other marginalized communities suffer disproportionately from governance deficits, and that too many governments scapegoat LGBT individuals to distract public attention away from those structural failures. The economic themes of the conference also provide an opportunity to emphasize that homophobia, transphobia and related forms of intolerance have economic costs, including to the trade and investment environments in emerging markets. In blunt terms, 'Brand Africa' is suffering in the eyes of fair-minded consumers in the United States and around the world. The U.S.- Africa Business Forum provides the opportunity to reach a new audience with that message, including CEOs and economic leaders in Africa.

We are grateful for your leadership in recognizing the rights of LGBT individuals in this country, and for your Administration's principled stand in support of the rights of LGBT citizens abroad. We trust you will use the opportunity of the Africa Leaders Summit to advance these commitments to human rights and human dignity for all.

Sincerely,



Mark Bromley
Council Chair
The Council for
Global Equality



Julie Dorf
Senior Advisor
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Michael Guest
Senior Advisor
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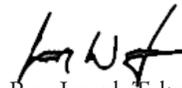


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