

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
For Immediate Release
2013/1293

September 26, 2013

Remarks

Secretary of State John Kerry
At the LGBT Ministerial Event

September 26, 2013
New York, New York

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, thank you very much (inaudible). Thank you, and I apologize to all of my colleagues for being a little bit late. I'm sorry about that.

But it is an enormous honor to be part of this event, which is the first of its kind in the history of the United Nations, and I think we should take pride in that. I thank the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, who I visited with in Washington just last week, and all of our colleagues who are here for joining together in an historic statement.

We really do send a clear and compelling message by coming together today, and it's not just in support of gays and lesbians around the world; it's really in support of the founding values of this institution.

When the United Nations was formed, the founders declared this purpose: "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, and in the dignity and worth of the human person." The human person, not one human person, not certain human persons, but the human person, all people. And for too long, with respect to affirming the dignity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender persons, this organization fell short of meeting that obligation, as did many entities in the world and many of our countries. With our work together over the past several years, we have made almost unfathomable progress in the rapidity with which people have come to break down walls of injustice and barriers of prejudice, really quite stunning. And I think we should all acknowledge that we are living up to, in this initiative and in other efforts that have taken place in the past years, the founding principles of the United Nations, and in many ways, the universal values that organize many of our societies.

For its part, the United States and the Obama Administration is fully committed to this work. I took personal satisfaction this past year when the United States Supreme Court overturned Section 3 of DOMA, the Defense of Marriage Act – and I say personal satisfaction because I was one of 14 senators who voted against that when it was passed – and that prevented federal recognition of same-sex marriages. That decision paves the way for policies and programs that support all married couples, regardless of their sexual orientation.

We also believe the United Nations is a powerful platform to advance our support for the human rights of LGBT persons. Advancing equality for LGBT persons isn't just the right thing to do. It's also fundamental to advancing democracy and human rights, which are at the foundation of American foreign policy, and I think the foreign policy of most of our colleagues, if not all of our colleagues here. We all know that as societies become more inclusive, they become better partners within the global community, and they become partners, all of whom are joined together by common values and common interests.

That is why we put such weight behind the unprecedented Human Rights Council resolution two years ago affirming LGBT rights. It's also why we co-authored, along with Colombia and Slovenia, a joint statement in support of these efforts that was signed by 85 UN members.

But this moment has to be more than a moment to simply celebrate how far we have come, or the historic nature of this particular event. When people continue to be harassed, arrested or even murdered simply because of who they are or who they love or what they believe, how their lives are organized and structured, then we have to recommit to our work together. In too many places around the world, LGBT persons are still punished for simply exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms.

The Global Equality Fund is one way in which likeminded countries can address this injustice and show their support for LGBT persons. Since the United States launched the Fund in 2011, it has allocated over 7 million in more than 50 countries worldwide. And the investments have helped to challenge the discriminatory laws that undermine human rights and bolster – and to bolster civil society organizations that defend those rights.

With support from a range of likeminded governments, including Netherlands, Norway, France, Germany, Iceland, Finland, Denmark, and private sector partners as well, we are expanding the scope of the programs that this Fund supports. Earlier this month, President Obama and the Prime Minister of Sweden Fredrik Reinfeldt announced an additional \$12 million for this effort. And today, I'm happy to announce another 1 million contribution from The Netherlands, and we're grateful to you for that.

We hope that every ally of LGBT persons around the world, including governments and corporations, are going to join us in this important work. And it's very, very clear that if we continue to work as we have been, if we come together at events like this and others, we do send a message of solidarity with LGBT persons around the world, and we strengthen their ability – some of them in very tough places – to be able to exercise their fundamental human rights.

As we think about our work ahead, we would do well to remember the fundamental challenge of the United Nations. Nearly 70 years ago, this body was created, quote, “to promote social progress and better standards of life, in larger freedom.” There are few areas where I think our task is so clear, and what we need to do is make sure that we are working for that larger freedom for all people, and for the rights and the dignity of LGBT persons around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

#