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Remarks by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice at American University on Global

LGBTQ Rights

"Promoting and Protecting LGBT Rights"

National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice

Remarks As Prepared For Delivery

American University, Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, October 26, 2016

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chad, Elisa, and Jim. I'm deeply grateful to the Human Rights Campaign and Human Rights First—who fight so admirably to promote equal rights and dignity for all. I also want to thank the AU School of International Service, President Kerwin, and Dean Goldgeier for hosting us. Jim and I were colleagues on the NSC back in the 1990s. These days, I spend a lot of my time in the Situation Room—no windows, no natural light. So, this beautiful atrium is a welcome change of scenery.

And, I'm honored to join so many dedicated advocates and allies in the fight for equality. A couple years ago, I had the privilege to meet with one of those advocates—a Ugandan LGBT activist named Frank Mugisha. Many of you know of him. I first heard of Frank when he led opposition to Uganda's notorious "Anti-Homosexuality Act." A day after the law passed, a Ugandan tabloid published his picture in a list of "top 200 homos," exposing Frank to grave personal risk. Shortly after that, sitting in my office in the West Wing, we discussed the situation he and other LGBT persons faced in Uganda, and how best the U.S. could support their efforts. Frank's spoke softly but with vision and the moral authority that comes from standing up to persecution. I came away impressed by Frank's eloquence and moved by his courage.

This past August, Frank was attending a Pride Week event when the police raided the venue. They beat a number of trans people in attendance, forcibly touching them to establish their so-called "real gender." Some participants were held at gunpoint. Frank himself was handcuffed and thrown into a police truck. Within 45 minutes of the raid, our team at the White House started receiving reports from civil society organizations, including the HRC. That same evening, the State Department

organized an emergency call with the U.S. Embassy in Kampala. Our ambassador engaged the Ugandan government. The next day, I tweeted a photo of Frank and myself that we had taken during his visit to my office. Our message was unmistakable: the United States government cares. Within 24 hours, Frank and the other activists were released.

We cannot give every case the attention we gave to Frank, as much as I wish we could. And, sometimes, our efforts are best served by raising our concerns privately. But, when a gay, civil society activist from a far-away country can be heard at the highest levels of the U.S. government, that itself is progress. When the United States can encourage another nation to do the right thing, together we are bending that arc of the moral universe ever so slightly towards justice. Yet, when countries enshrine homophobia and bigotry into law, when police abuse and arrest citizens simply for being who they are, when Frank's friend and fellow advocate David Kato is bludgeoned to death with a hammer in his own home, we still have a great deal of work to do. So, today, I'd like to discuss the significant progress we've made in advancing LGBT rights, the challenges we still face, and where I believe the United States must continue to focus in the years to come.

The unshakeable conviction that all people are equally endowed with fundamental and irrevocable rights has been central to our nation from the beginning. The story of America is one of striving to fulfill our ideals and always gradually expanding the circle of inclusion; it stretches from Selma to Stonewall to frontiers yet to come. For me, this issue is deeply personal. As the daughter of proud citizens who suffered the indignities of Jim Crow, I never forget that I stand here today because those who came before me pried open doors that had long been shut to people who looked like me. As a public servant and as a mother, I don't want my children, or anyone else's, to be limited by how they look, who they worship, or whom they love.

As President Obama has said, "Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law—for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well." Of course, it has taken generations of protest and struggle to begin to realize that vision. Many have fallen in the battle that continues, heroes like Harvey Milk, Eric Lembembe, Xulhaz Mannan, and too many others. Matthew Shepherd—killed for the crime of being himself—would have turned 40 this year.

Whether we are talking about race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, this fight for equal rights is what our history and values demand. It is also profoundly in our interests. If we reduce the disparities that can lead to instability and violence, we increase our shared security. Countries do better—across every metric—when they tap the talents of all their people. A 2014 USAID study estimates that expanding rights for a country’s LGBT population is associated with an increase in GDP. So, advancing equality is both morally right and strategically smart.

From his earliest days in office, President Obama and those of us on his national security team have worked to strengthen LGBT rights at home and promote them abroad. There’s no question that we still have a distance to go. But we can be proud of the steps we’ve taken towards a more perfect union and a more just and equal world.

Just eight years ago, when President Obama took office, the federal government treated violent crimes motivated by anti-LGBT bias the same as any other. Today, law enforcement has the tools to prosecute these heinous acts as what they are—hate crimes. Eight years ago, LGBT service members had to hide who they loved to serve the country they loved. Today, as President Obama said, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell don’t exist no more.” The Secretary of the Army is a proud gay man. And, transgender Americans can now serve openly. Eight years ago, same-sex marriage was legal in just two states. Today—thanks to many people in this room—DOMA is history, and marriage equality is the law of the land in all 50 states. That Friday night of the landmark Supreme Court ruling, my husband I took a photo together that we cherish, outside of the White House lit up in the colors of the rainbow to celebrate what we’ve always known—that love is love is love.

When I started in government in the ‘90s, an openly gay ambassador was almost inconceivable. You couldn’t even get a security clearance if you were LGBT. One of my closest staffers, as a young Foreign Service officer, once asked if he and other employees could screen a documentary at the State Department about a gay nightclub in Cairo that was brutally raided by the Egyptian police. He was told no—it would be too controversial and too damaging to our relationship with Egypt. That was in 2003. Not long ago, the State Department would pay for a diplomat’s pet to travel to his overseas post, but not his or her same-sex partner. In the event of an embassy evacuation, a diplomat’s loved one could even be left behind. I’m not making this up.

Under President Obama, LGBT federal employees and their families now enjoy the same benefits as their coworkers. Federal contractors cannot discriminate against LGBT people. Transgender employees can obtain passports that accurately reflect their gender identity. LGBT people can serve openly and proudly throughout government—from desk officers to the NSC staff to eight openly gay ambassadors. In Vietnam this past May, I got to catch up with Ambassador Ted Osius, who is skillfully advancing American interests in Southeast Asia. He and I were colleagues as junior staffers 20 years ago. As one aide commented, Ted “is not ‘the gay ambassador to Vietnam.’ He is the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam who also happens to be gay.” Secretary Kerry also created a Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons, and appointed Randy Berry, a distinguished veteran diplomat, who we’re honored to have with us today. Randy’s position is the first of its kind in the world, and he’s been relentless and indefatigable—visiting dozens of countries, engaging governments, and working with civil society, faith, and business leaders to help strengthen LGBT rights.

In 2011, President Obama released a landmark Presidential Memorandum, directing that our diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect LGBT rights, all around the world—from ensuring our assistance advances equality, to protecting vulnerable LGBT refugees, to engaging international organizations in the fight against discrimination. We’re putting this directive into action through efforts like the public-private Global Equality Fund, which has allocated \$30 million to support advocates on the front lines in 80 countries. And, we’ve hosted three major White House conferences on LGBT rights to bring together activists, government leaders, and civil society to strategize on how to advance these goals.

I’m equally proud of the progress we’ve made in our multilateral institutions—an effort I was honored to lead during my four and a half years as UN Ambassador. In 2010—for the first time ever—the United States joined the UN “Core Group,” a group of countries working to put LGBT rights front and center. We worked in the UN Human Rights Council to pass the first UN resolution exclusively on the human rights of LGBT people—and succeeded. We fought to allow several LGBT organizations to gain UN accreditation and have their voices heard—and won. When a UN committee voted to eliminate any mention of LGBT individuals from a resolution condemning the extrajudicial killing of vulnerable people around the world, I said “hell no.” On Human Rights Day, I pledged to use all of America’s influence to reverse that outrage. We battled to restore the reference to sexual orientation. And, once again, we won.

These were some of my proudest moments at the UN, and I'm gratified that my successor, Ambassador Samantha Power, has been a great champion of LGBT rights and continued strong American leadership on this issue. Last year, the United States blocked a mean-spirited Russian effort to deny benefits to the families of gay UN employees. Ambassador Power might have had to drag some folks out of the bathroom, but we won that one, too. In August of last year, the United States and Chile co-sponsored the first-ever UN Security Council meeting on LGBT issues, which focused on ISIL's violence against LGBT people. After the appalling terrorist attack in Orlando, the United States secured a strong condemnation from the Security Council including the first-ever mention of "sexual orientation." And, this year, we successfully lobbied to appoint the first "Independent Expert" on sexual orientation and gender identity, giving the UN a strong advocate to report on and work to prevent violations of LGBT rights worldwide.

This is what progress looks like. This is what sustained American leadership can help achieve. This is what we mean when we insist that LGBT rights are human rights.

At the same time, we're seeing public attitudes evolve with breathtaking speed. Brave professional athletes have come out. The show *Transparent* continues to rack up Emmy Awards. Last week, dozens of White House staffers gathered on the steps of the Executive Office Building, wearing purple to take a stand against anti-LGBT bullying. And, earlier this month, on National Coming Out Day, Americans across the country told friends and family who they were, and in countless instances were reassured that they were as loved and valued as ever.

Across the globe as well, equality is on the march. A decade ago, nearly half the countries in the world—92 nations—criminalized same-sex relationships. As of last year, that's down to 75 countries—still far too high. Anti-LGBT laws are being challenged and lifted, from Mozambique to Belize. The United States is one of nearly two dozen countries with marriage equality. Nepal's new constitution is the first in Asia to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. A surge of openly LGBT politicians are being elected, including the prime minister of Luxembourg and transgender legislators in Venezuela and the Philippines. Boisterous Pride parades are appearing in rather unexpected places, like Kiev and Taipei.

Day by day, we're overturning discriminatory laws, changing hearts and minds, ending what Harvey

Milk called “the conspiracy of silence.” Yet, as President Obama has warned, progress is not inevitable. History does not just move forward. It can travel backwards. Paradoxically, the growing acceptance and visibility of LGBT rights—at home and abroad—has, in too many cases, prompted a troubling backlash. Just five months ago, the world was jolted by the horrendous attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando—the deadliest mass shooting in American history. Across the United States, we’ve seen a disturbing increase in laws denying services to gay people and proposals for so-called “bathroom bills” targeting the trans community.

Meanwhile, countries like Indonesia are making it harder for LGBT citizens to enjoy their rights. Governments in Central Asia and Eastern Europe are considering or have passed laws even worse than Russia’s infamous “propaganda” law, which prohibits disseminating information about “non-traditional” sexual relationships—meaning gay parents can’t talk to their own children about their relationships. Last summer, Russian authorities arrested a gay couple for the “crime” of placing a candle at a memorial for the Orlando victims. By some counts, in as many as ten countries, same-sex acts are punishable by death.

And, in Syria and Iraq, ISIL has unleashed a unique brutality on LGBT people—dragging gay men behind trucks, stoning them, and burning them alive. ISIL works with chilling efficiency, often going through the cell phones and social media accounts of their victims to identify more LGBT individuals for slaughter. As we speak, the United States is supporting Iraqi and Kurdish forces as they push to liberate Mosul, where ISIL fighters were taped hurling gay men off of buildings. As one Iraqi man testified before the UN: “In my society, being gay means death.” So, while we can be proud of what we have done together, we cannot forget that our work is very far from finished. And, with the time remaining, allow me to focus on how I believe the United States should intensify our efforts to protect and promote these rights.

First, the United States must continue to integrate LGBT rights into our government and foreign policy. That includes creating a more diverse national security workforce. This is an issue that I’m particularly passionate about, and one that President Obama has prioritized. Because without tapping America’s full range of races, religions, ethnicities, social and economic experiences—without embracing people of every sexual orientation and gender identity—we’re leading in a complex world with one hand tied behind our back.

The United States also needs to do more to institutionalize efforts to promote LGBT rights. As part of that commitment, I'm pleased to note that just yesterday a new rule went into effect that explicitly prohibits discrimination by USAID contractors. This rule means that any organization that contracts with USAID must ensure that all people can benefit from its federally-funded programs, regardless of race, religion, disability—or sexual orientation and gender identity. It's a major step towards ensuring that American assistance is provided in a fair and equitable manner.

In addition, the Administration has made clear that the President would veto the House-passed National Defense Authorization Act because, among other provisions, it would undermine important worker protections prohibiting discrimination by federal contractors, including against LGBT people. This provision is a step in the wrong direction, and that's why we'll continue working to ensure that every qualified American worker can hold jobs funded by the American people.

Second, the United States must continue to stand up and speak out when the rights of LGBT people are threatened. Chad, as you put it, "Nations that place LGBT people in the cross hairs of danger must know that the United States will not turn a blind eye." This is not merely to "name and shame." It's not about being self-righteous. It's about leading the world to the recognition that in the 21st century, discrimination cannot be tolerated, and prejudice comes with a price.

I don't pretend that the United States has a perfect record. Hardly. And, yes, in service of our national security interests we sometimes engage with governments that do not respect the rights we hold most dear. But, I'm proud that when we've witnessed anti-LGBT violence or discrimination, the United States has put our opposition to this behavior front and center.

That's why President Obama spoke out on this issue in Senegal and Kenya, where he publicly declared that treating people differently because of who they love is wrong. That's why, when Ambassador Wally Brewster—a former HRC board member—was viciously slandered and pressured to leave the Dominican Republic this year, we didn't bow to bigotry. We underscored that Ambassador Brewster had the full support of President Obama, the White House, and the entire U.S. government. And, when the President of The Gambia said that gay Gambians should have their throats slit, we strongly condemned those abhorrent comments, as well as legislation that restricted the rights of LGBT people and reports of arrests and torture of LGBT individuals. Based in part on

this shameful record, we revoked The Gambia's trade preferences. And, the United States government should continue to respond swiftly and surely to this kind of repression.

Third, the United States must continue working with our partners in multilateral organizations to build international support for LGBT rights. Now, it's not always easy to make change through an organization like the UN. Take it from a former UN Ambassador. But, we've had some great partners, including our outgoing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who I want to thank for his leadership on this issue. We've also enjoyed vital support from our friends in the Global South. And, these partnerships are a very good thing. Because, as influential as the United States is, to change behavior around the world, we have to work as a team.

You might ask whether a UN resolution ever changes behavior in the "real world." The truth is, sometimes it can. A few decades ago, the idea that women and girls should be treated equally was controversial. Now, thanks in part to work in multilateral institutions, gender equality is written into our new Sustainable Development Goals. It's on the agenda in countless meetings. Views—and policies—have shifted. So, when we include language acknowledging sexual orientation in a UN resolution, or hold an unprecedented Security Council meeting on LGBT issues, we create new norms and expectations. We redefine what's acceptable and what's not.

Finally, the United States must continue to work with civil society and other partners to improve LGBT lives on the ground. I've joined President Obama as he's met with LGBT activists from St. Petersburg to Havana. Earlier this year, I got to meet 30 advocates from around the world attending an HRC global summit. I'm constantly amazed by the passion, creativity, and commitment of activists on the frontlines of change. So, help us understand and address the challenges you face. Help us explore ways to keep expanding the reach of equality, such as by recognizing the unique concerns of intersex individuals. Keep coming to us with your stories, your insights, and your requests. Press us to live up to the ideals I've just described.

I know the challenges are daunting. The slurs, the hate, the violence can feel overwhelming. But when I look at what we've accomplished, I'm filled with hope. I'm hopeful when I think of how my own son and daughter are part of a generation in this country that embraces LGBT rights as obvious and uncontroversial. I'm hopeful because of you. And, I'm hopeful because, last month, my husband

and I celebrated our 24th wedding anniversary. For many couples, that might not seem remarkable. But, we remember, when we started dating almost 35 years ago, that many people said that someone who looked like me shouldn't marry someone who looked like him—that inter-racial marriage was unnatural and immoral. Stop me if that sounds familiar.

That fight for equality was just—so is this one. We have largely won that fight—and we'll win this one. Ultimately, we will realize, as the activist Audre Lord said, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

Somewhere in the world right now, there is a young boy lying awake at night guarding a secret he has kept for as long as he can remember. Somewhere, there is a young woman who can love both men and women and has nobody to tell her that's OK. Somewhere, in the United States, there is a man who has always felt like a stranger in his own body. So, to every person who might still be struggling with who they are, trying to reconcile who they love with the faith or traditions they love, know this: we see you. We hear you. We are here for you. And, on behalf of all those people—each of them a child of equal worth, a child of God—let us renew our efforts to battle discrimination in all its guises and embrace diversity in all its forms. Until every one of us is truly treated equally—no matter who we are, where we live, or whom we love. Thank you.

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