

March 23, 2010

RE: S. Res. 409

Dear Members of the U.S. Senate:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge you to stand in support of the health and human rights of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and support Senate Resolution 409.

S. Res. 409, introduced on February 4, 2010 by Senators Feingold, Coburn, Collins and Cardin calls upon members of the Parliament in Uganda to reject the proposed “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” that would expand penalties for homosexuality to include the death penalty and require citizens to report information about homosexuality to the police or face imprisonment. The resolution also calls for the governments of all countries to reject and repeal similar criminalization laws, and encourages the Secretary of State to closely monitor human rights abuses that occur because of sexual orientation and to encourage the repeal of laws that permit such abuses.

Criminal penalties against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity violate universal human rights, demean human dignity, and threaten to undermine the effectiveness of the global response to HIV.

The effort to halt and reverse the spread of HIV & AIDS globally is compromised by punitive legal environments that further marginalize communities at high risk for HIV. Gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in low- and middle-income countries are 19 times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general population¹. Criminal laws that expressly target this population drive the community underground, fueling risk-taking behavior in a climate of fear and silence, and making it difficult to reach MSM with the information and services they need. Investments in PEPFAR, totaling over \$32.3 billion since FY 2004, will not achieve their full potential in a political climate that is hostile to key affected populations.

The proposed “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” in Uganda has drawn international criticism—from multiple Democratic and Republican members of the US Congress, Secretary Clinton, the Vatican, and heads of state, including President Obama. Thousands of human rights and health groups as well as physicians and health professionals from around the world and across the U.S. have spoken out against the proposed bill.

In March 2009, the United States signed on to the United Nations Statement on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, which reaffirms the universality of human rights and calls for the repeal of same-sex criminalization laws. As U.S. Senators,

¹ Baral S, Sifakis F, Cleghorn F, Beyrer C. Elevated Risk for HIV Infection among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Low- and Middle-Income Countries 2000-2006: A Systematic Review. PLoS Med. 2007 Dec;4(12):e339

you have a key role to play in championing the realization of these principles on a domestic and world stage.

We thank you for your leadership in this regard and ask for your continued support to stand up for health and human rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation. We urge you to express your support for these principles by signing on to Senate Resolution 409.

For more information, please contact Krista Lauer (klauer@msmgf.org; 213-201-1317) and Jirair Ratevosian (jirair.ratevosian@amfar.org; 202-331-8600).

Sincerely,

Academy for Education Development
Adelson Consulting Services, Inc.
Advocates for Youth
Africa Action
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Action Council
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
The AIDS Institute
AIDS Policy Project
AIDS Project Los Angeles
American Jewish World Service
American Public Health Association
amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
AVAC
Boulder County AIDS Project
Cascade AIDS Project
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP)
Council for Global Equality
EngenderHealth
Family Care International
Harlem United Community AIDS Center
The Fenway Institute
Gay Men's Health Crisis
Global Action for Children
Global AIDS Alliance
The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF)
Global Justice Ministry, Metropolitan Community Churches
Health Alliance International
HIVictorious, Inc.
HIV Medicine Association
Housing Works

Human Rights Campaign
Infectious Diseases Society of America Center for Global Health Policy
International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care
The International Center For Advocacy On The Right To Health (ICARH)
International HIV/AIDS Alliance
International Rectal Microbicide Advocates (IRMA)
International Women's Health Coalition
Internet Interventions, Inc.
Justice Resource Institute
Maryland Hepatitis Coalition
Metropolitan Latino AIDS Coalition (MLAC)
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS
National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC)
Physicians for Human Rights
Queer People's Health Collective
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
STOP AIDS Project
U.S. Positive Women's Network (PWN)
Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Disease (WORLD)
World Aids Campaign