

RELEASE IN PART
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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2010 10:04 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: This is good.

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From: Richard Socarides [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, March 04, 2010 11:49 AM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: This is good.

State Department Investigating LGBT Treatment In Uganda and Throughout Africa

Posted: 03 Mar 2010 11:01 PM PST

Last January, we reported that Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) wrote to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and US Trade Representative Ron Kirk, asking them to "communicate immediately to the Ugandan government, and President Yoweri Museveni directly, that Uganda's beneficiary status under AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) will be revoked should the proposed legislation be enacted." The legislation he's referring to, of course, is the draconian Anti-Homosexuality Bill that is, as far as we are able to determine, awaiting its second reading before Parliament.

The State Department has now responded to Sen. Wyden's request. In a letter dated Feb 22, 2010 and released by Sen. Wyden's office, Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs Richard Verma responded that the department is not only "identified this issue as a priority in our bilateral relationship" with Uganda (PDF: 112KB/2 pages):

We have reached out at the highest levels; Secretary Clinton and Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson have discussed our concerns directly with President Museveni. In addition, our embassy in Kampala has been in close and regular contact with key political, media and civil society actors on the ground in Uganda, registering strong opposition to the bill and warning the Ugandans of potential consequences if it passes. The ambassador reiterated our concerns with President Museveni as recently as January 25, and Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero just visited Uganda on January 29. She met and offered support and encouragement to civil society groups opposed to the legislation and underscored our views to senior Ugandan officials. We are following this bill very closely.

In Museveni's remarks urging Parliament to "go slow" on considering the draconian legislation, he cited a long conversation with Secretary Clinton in declaring that the bill was not just a domestic issue but also had foreign policy considerations.

Assistant Secretary Verma characterized Uganda's proposed bill "a serious affront to internationally accepted human rights standards." And interestingly, the State Department's concerns aren't limited to Uganda:

The State Department is also evaluating attitudes and laws that marginalize and criminalize and penalize the LGBT community in Africa more broadly. We have asked all of our embassies in Africa to report on host country laws and pending legislation that criminalizes homosexuality. In addition, our Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor has established a task force on LGBT issues to strategize a United States Government response to LBGT issues worldwide.

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