The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Gayle Smith  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Kerry and Administrator Smith:

We applaud the ongoing work of the Department of State and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to advance the human rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) persons around the world, and write today to encourage continued support for and the institutionalization of programs that address the global challenges of the LGBT community.

In 2011, President Obama addressed the United Nations General Assembly and stated that “no country should deny people their rights because of who they love, which is why we must stand up for the rights of gays and lesbians everywhere.” Soon thereafter, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum, entitled “International Initiatives to Advance the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons,” to address the global challenges of the LGBT community.

In the following years, we saw the creation of the Senior LGBT Coordinator at USAID and the Office of the Special Envoy for Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Persons at the Department of State. Our commitment to promoting the human rights of the LGBT community is clear, and we must ensure it continues.

In light of the ongoing discrimination and violence faced by LGBT people around the world, their struggle for equality and justice abroad remains significant. There are still many countries in which homosexuality is illegal, LGBT persons are persecuted, and public support for the LGBT community is prohibited. Over 75 countries have anti-LGBT laws. There were nearly 300 reported cases of transgender people murdered in 29 different countries last year, with countless unreported cases around the globe. The LGBT community in Indonesia has seen an increase in
harassment and abuse, including by government officials. Recently, two gay rights activists were brutally murdered in Bangladesh.

In 2014, 53 members of Congress signed letters requesting robust funding for the Office of the Senior LGBT Coordinator at USAID to support efforts to further protect the human rights of LGBT persons. We continue to support robust funding for USAID’s LGBT portfolio, including the budget, staff, and resources necessary to institutionalize its ability to advance the human rights of LGBT persons around the world. Specifically, we support the creation of permanent positions at USAID to ensure continuity in leadership of this important portfolio into the future.

We also strongly urge full support for institutionalizing the Department of State Office of the Special Envoy. This will be critical to its ability to carry out its mission in the years ahead — affirming and strengthening the U.S. commitment to LGBT equality as a permanent and critical component of our international human rights policy.

It is a moral and strategic imperative for the United States to continue to protect and expand human rights for all people, regardless of who they are and whom they love. The Department of State and USAID, as representatives of the United States government worldwide, are in a unique and influential position to advance the basic human rights of all people. We express our sincerest gratitude for the historic steps that you have already taken to advance LGBT rights. We urge you to take the necessary steps at the Department of State and USAID to institutionalize, integrate, and make permanent the United States’ commitment to advancing the rights of LGBT persons around the world.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

David N. Cicilline
United States Representative

Alan Lowenthal
United States Representative

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Eliot L. Engel
United States Representative

James P. McGovern
United States Representative
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Gayle Smith
Page 3

Barbara Mikulski
United States Senator

Mark Pocan
United States Representative

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Sean Patrick Maloney
United States Representative

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Jared Polis
United States Representative

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Mark Takano
United States Representative

Al Franken
United States Senator

Kyriksen Sinema
United States Representative

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Derek Kilmer
United States Representative

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Alcee L. Hastings
United States Representative
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Gayle Smith
Page 4

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Adam Smith
United States Representative

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Dan Kildee
United States Representative

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Jerrold Nadler
United States Representative

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Mark DeSaulnier
United States Representative

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Jim McDermott
United States Representative

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Eleanor Holmes Norton
United States Representative

Christopher Murphy
United States Senator

Jan Schakowsky
United States Representative
The Honorable John Kerry  
The Honorable Gayle Smith  
Page 8

Earl Blumenauer  
United States Representative

Diana DeGette  
United States Representative

Elizabeth H. Esty  
United States Representative

Carolyn B. Maloney  
United States Representative

Niki Tsongas  
United States Representative

Luis V. Gutiérrez  
United States Representative

Tony Cárdenas  
United States Representative

Frederica S. Wilson  
United States Representative

CC:  
The Honorable Heather Higginbottom  
Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

CC:  
Ambassador Al Lenhardt  
Deputy Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

CC:  
The Honorable Shaun Donovan  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503