

U.S. endorses homosexuality

Obama admin. OKs U.N. declaration

Posted on Mar 18, 2009 | by Staff WASHINGTON (BP)--The Obama administration announced March 18 its support for a United Nations declaration urging the global decriminalization of homosexuality three months after the Bush administration refused to endorse it.

The news, reported by the Associated Press, marked a reversal in the United States' position on a non-binding measure considered by the U.N. General Assembly Dec. 18. At that time, 66 countries backed the barrier-breaking declaration, while more than 50 opposed it and the remainder of the 192 members abstained, according to The New York Times.

"The United States supports the U.N.'s statement on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity and is pleased to join the other 66 U.N. member states who have declared their support of the statement," State Department spokesman Robert Wood said, according to AP.

"The United States is an outspoken defender of human rights and critic of human rights abuses around the world," Wood said. "As such, we join with other supporters of this statement, and we will continue to remind countries of the importance of respecting the human rights of all people in all appropriate international fora."

The U.N. declaration goes beyond decriminalization, according to the Family Research Council (FRC). "It condemns not only 'violence' and 'harassment,' but also 'stigmatization and prejudice,' terms which some would apply to any disapproval of homosexual conduct, no matter how peaceful and loving," FRC President Tony Perkins wrote in his March 18 "Washington Update" e-mail.

In December, officials of the Bush administration said it opposed the proclamation as too broad, charging it might be seen as an effort to abrogate states' rights on such issues as "same-sex marriage," according to The Times. The declaration says in part, "We urge States to ensure that human rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity are investigated and perpetrators held accountable and brought to justice."

"We are opposed to any discrimination, legally or politically, but the nature of our federal system prevents us from undertaking commitments and engagements where federal authorities don't have jurisdiction," Alejandro Wolff, the deputy permanent U.S. representative to the U.N., was quoted by The Times as saying in December.

But after an inter-agency review, the Obama administration decided the declaration would not commit the U.S. to any "legal obligations," Wood was quoted as saying in AP.

The Times said the December action marked the first time a "homosexual rights" declaration had been read in the General Assembly.

In addition to the U.S., other U.N. members that declined to endorse the declaration were the Vatican, China, Russia and members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, The Times reported.

In a Dec. 18 written statement, the Vatican said it opposes criminal penalties for homosexuality and violence against homosexuals. The declaration, however, "goes well beyond" those issues, it said. The classifications of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" used in the document "find no recognition or clear and agreed definition in international law," the Vatican said.

In addition to France, the supporters of the declaration in December included the other 26 members of the European Union, as well as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Israel, Japan and Mexico, according to news reports.

Seventy U.N. members have laws against homosexuality, according to AP. The death penalty exists for homosexuality in seven countries, Bloomberg News reported. They are Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

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