International Backlash
The Religious Right at the UN

In a single two-day period this summer, the United Nations Human Rights Council gave advocates for LGBTQ equality their most significant victory yet at the UN and simultaneously gave anti-LGBTQ “traditional” family proponents a major win in their intensifying campaign against that progress.

With the first vote, the Council created an “independent expert” position charged with investigating and reporting on violence and discrimination against LGBTQ people, a milestone within the UN system that was won through years of hard work by advocacy organizations and persistent diplomacy by the U.S. and other pro-equality nations. But the very next day, social conservatives celebrated when the same Council, by an even wider margin, approved a resolution on the “protection” of the family while rejecting efforts to include language inclusive of diverse forms of family.

These seemingly contradictory results point to the complexity of the intense diplomatic and rhetorical struggles being waged every day within UN agencies and other international bodies over fundamental questions whose answers can affect millions of lives: Who does international law recognize as a family? Are human rights universal or are they subordinate to “traditional” religious and cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality?

Women and LGBTQ people have much at stake in these debates, and much at stake in upcoming changes in two crucial leadership positions. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who has energetically promoted international recognition for the rights of LGBTQ people over stiff opposition from many countries, will step down at the end of the year (to be replaced by António Guterres). Shortly thereafter, U.S. President Barack Obama, whose administration’s foreign policy has placed a high priority on advancing and protecting LGBTQ human rights, will complete his final term.

Under the best-case scenario, in which a new UN Secretary General and a new U.S. president are both committed to the principle of LGBTQ equality, the priority they place on its promotion and defense will make an important difference to the lives and rights of people around the world. And even with strong allies in these leadership positions, LGBTQ human rights will be threatened by a global movement that is committed to defending “traditional” ideologies regarding sexuality and gender and to resisting LGBTQ equality as a form of cultural imperialism.

American religious conservatives play an important role in this movement, which Political Research Associates LGBTQ & Gender Justice Researcher L. Cole Parke has written is “aimed at cementing a patriarchal and heteronormative family structure as the fundamental unit of society, and then using that as a tool to advance conservative, right-wing social policies through the UN and other international organizations.”

In this global human rights struggle, U.S. Religious Right leaders are making their stand against LGBTQ people and with the world’s most repressive regimes.

AT THE UNITED NATIONS, HISTORIC PROGRESS BRINGS RESENTMENT AND RESISTANCE

On Human Rights Day in December 2010, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon gave a landmark speech calling for universal decriminalization of homosexuality, in which he declared, “Let there be no confusion: where there is tension between cultural attitudes and universal human rights, universal human rights must carry the day.”

With help from Ban Ki-moon’s outspoken leadership and an active LGBT Core Group whose member states provide most of the UN budget, advocates for LGBTQ equality have made remarkable strides at the UN in recent years (see timeline online at politicalresearch.org). Those efforts are supported by social media outreach from the UN Free &
Equal campaign, which was launched in 2013. Free & Equal Director Charles Radcliffe says the campaign “comple- 
ments the more traditional diplomatic methods” the UN uses to engage gov- 
ernments in promoting and protecting equal rights and fair treatment for LGBTQ people. Its audience, he says, is 
neither enthusiastic supporters nor die-hard opponents of equality, but “people who might never have given 
these issues much thought, who never considered themselves LGBTQ allies, but who are willing to open their hearts and minds to change.” The campaign has created a series of videos that have 
garnered worldwide attention; Radcliffe says that its Bollywood-style short, “The Welcome,” has become the UN’s most 
watched YouTube video.

But that progress and visible advo- 
cacy have provoked resentment, resis- 
tance, and counter-organizing. Russia, 
media, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and some African 
countries are leading the resistance among member states at the UN, with a 
key ally in the Holy See. They are being assisted by global networks of activist 
organizations of conservative evangeli- 
cal Christians, Catholics, and Mormons 
that are fighting equality at the UN and in other international arenas such as the 
European Union and Organization of American States.

To the extent that the United Nations 
exists at all in the U.S. popular imagina- 
tion, it may be seen as a large auditori- 
um in which world leaders give weighty 
speeches, or, depending on your media 
source, a cesspool of anti-American 
rhetoric paid for with U.S. tax dollars. 
In reality, the UN is a complex ecosys- 
tem of agencies, commissions, and pro- 
grams that carry out far-reaching work in 
many political and social arenas.

In the realm of human rights, the UN 
is guided by the Universal Declaration of 
Human Rights, adopted by its General 
Assembly in 1948, as well as by subse- 
quent international agreements and the 
commitments and treaty bodies charged with interpreting and implementing 
them. It is within these bodies that pitched battles are fought over words and phrases that may seem innocuous by themselves, but which can shape the 
work of UN agencies and the lives of 
people around the world.

When a particular formulation, such 
as language recognizing the human 
rights of LGBTQ people, gets codified 
in an official document, that document 
can then be cited by other agencies and 
parts to support their own work. Navi 
Pillay, who served as UN High Commissi- 
ioner for Human Rights from 2008- 
2014, noted several years ago that 
sometimes history is made with great 
fanfare, and sometimes it is made in ordi- 

For example, an Australian man ar- 

argued to the Human Rights Committee 
in 1991 that the criminalization of consensual 
gay sex by the state of Tasmania 
violated his rights under the Interna- 
tional Covenant on Civil and Political 
Rights (ICCPR), and in 1994 the com- 
mittee agreed. That ruling did not lead 
to a global repeal of laws that criminal- 
ize homosexual behavior, but it was 
an important step in establishing the 
still-contested principle that anti-gay 
discrimination is a violation of human 
rights and treaty obligations.

Battles over language are an impor- 
tant part of the continual debates in UN 

todies over sexual and reproductive 
health and rights (SRHR) and sexual 
orientation and gender identity (SOGI). 
Advocates for LGBTQ equality look for 
opportunities to promote equal rights for 
LGBTQ people and generate 
official recognition that there are 
multiple kinds of fami- 
lies, while op- 
opponents fight for language that explic- 
itly defines family as a married man and 
woman and their children, or at least 
includes more inclusive formulations. 
As PRA’s Kapya Kaoma said in remarks at a 2014 Human Rights Day event at the 
UN, “Defending the ‘traditional family’ has come to mean demonizing sexual 
minorities.”

While votes in UN bodies are ultimate- 
ly cast by representatives of nations, 
nongovernmental organizations, often 
referred to collectively as “civil society,” 
play a significant role in providing dele- 
gates with research, talking points, and 
public and political pressure. Simply 
collecting data can make a difference. 
Human rights consultant Sheherzade 
Kara says that one of the main reasons 
that the UN Human Rights Council has 
addressed these issues is because civil 
society groups have brought attention to 
human rights violations against LGBTQ 
people. Civil society organizations 
also play an important role, says the 
UN Foundation’s Peter Yeo, in bringing 
member states together to think about 
common vision and strategies.

One site of many language struggles 
has been the Commission on the Status 
of Women (CSW). This year, the con- 
servative Family Watch International (FWI) reported that it fielded a team of 
22 volunteers from six countries to at- 
tend the CSW’s March meeting to coun- 
ter Western countries’ attempt “to force their sexual rights/abortion agenda on 

developing countries” by replacing the 
term “the family” with “various forms of 
the family” in the meeting’s “outcome 
document”—an official report of a gather- 
ing’s findings and/or agreements. 
FWI celebrated the deletion of explicit 
references to SOGI and SRHR but com- 
plained that the document still included 
language on reproductive rights, con- 
traception, and the phrase “the right to 

For a web-exclusive Timeline of LGBTQ 
Progress and Resistance at the United 
Nations, go to: www.politicalresearch.org.
es to LGBTQ people or to the role of the family in achieving the goals. While “pro-family” groups had pushed hard to have the role of the family explicitly included in the goals, they celebrated the role of Nigeria’s Ambassador, “who vocally denounced any attempt to impose LGBTQ rights on his country, and demanded that the draft agreement be ‘cleaned’ during negotiations.” He also “denounced ongoing attempts to read abortion and LGBTQ rights into the agreement through implementation efforts that are already underway.”

**CLASH OF WORLDVIEWS AT THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

The Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council has been one of the arenas in which pro-LGBTQ organizing has borne fruit. In June 2011, the Council adopted a resolution, sponsored by the government of South Africa, which expressed “grave concern” over violence and discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and requested a report on the topic from the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Council adopted a similar resolution again in 2014; by this time South Africa had ceded its leadership on the issue under fire from other African countries, and a group of Latin American countries led by Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and Uruguay stepped in. The following June, when the High Commissioner’s office released its report on discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, it called for decriminalization, repeal of “anti-propaganda” laws that restrict public advocacy for LGBTQ equality in the name of protecting youth, and legal recognition for same-sex couples and their families, among other steps.

The next move for LGBTQ human rights advocates was to push for a vote on the creation of an “independent expert” position that would be given the responsibility of investigating human rights abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Because this would represent a significant victory, the effort was resisted even more fiercely by conservative groups like C-Fam (the Center for Family and Human Rights, formerly known as the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute), which warned that it would be a “major catastrophe” to have sexual orientation and gender identity given this kind of standing in international law. Pro-LGBTQ civil society organizations lobbied heavily for the resolution, which was supported by 628 non-governmental organizations from 151 countries, 70 percent of them from the Global South.

On behalf of most members of the Organisation for Islamic Co-operation, Pakistan fought “tooth and nail” against the resolution, says Peter Yeo at the UN Foundation. Saying the resolution would override local values and sovereignty, Pakistan introduced a number of amendments that were intended to weaken it. Amendments to strip out references to sexual orientation and gender identity failed, but among the amendments that passed were those that encouraged respect for local values and “religious sensitivities” and condemned “coercive measures” taken to push countries to change their laws and policies.

On June 30, 2016, the amended resolution was approved 23-18 with six countries abstaining; it affirmed that all people are “entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” decried violence and discrimination committed against people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and appointed, for a period of three years, an “Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.”

Human rights groups praised its passage as a “historic victory for the human rights of all persons who are at risk of discrimination and violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.” But C-Fam’s Austin Ruse described the independent expert position as an “LGBT Enforcer” who “will travel the world making sure that traditional people may no longer practice their sincerely held religious belief,” adding that it was created “via threats and intimidation by UN, EU, and US bureaucrats.”

Ruse’s organization praised countries that spoke against the independent expert, including Pakistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. C-Fam quoted Nigeria’s representative complaining that the United Nations agenda had been “hi-

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**Participants at the 16th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. Photo: UN/Jean-Marc Ferré via Flickr. License: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/**

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FALL 2016
ambassador criticized the sponsors’ “arrogant and confrontational approach” and suggested that his country’s collaborative path out of apartheid should be a model for the Council’s deliberations. \(^{36}\) The comparison drew a rebuke from South African LGBTQ advocate Graeme Reid, who heads the LGBTQ program at Human Rights Watch. “The ambassador’s statement is a betrayal of the essence of South Africa’s constitution,” he said. “To invoke the struggle against apartheid as justification for not supporting a resolution on violence and discrimination is both inaccurate and cynical.” \(^{37}\)

The day after passage of the independent expert resolution, the Human Rights Council approved a larger margin a resolution calling for the protection of the family. \(^{38}\) The Human Rights Council approved “protection of the family” resolution in a resolution about the role of the family in alleviating poverty and achieving sustainable development. Sharon Slater, president of the conservative Family Watch International, called the 2015 resolution “by far the strongest and most comprehensive pro-family UN document ever” and said “pro-family UN delegations worked hard to achieve this in the face of great opposition.” \(^{42}\) Slater declared:

“This is a tremendous victory for the family and represents the first major fruits of the work of a new, growing and vigorous coalition of governments at the UN, which are deeply concerned about the worldwide disintegration of the family. It is essential that all of us around the world, especially those of us living in the developed countries that push anti-family policies, show our support for the courageous and vital work of these pro-family countries.” \(^{43}\)

The 2016 family protection language was part of a resolution on the rights of people with disabilities. It reaffirms that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and is entitled to protection by society and the State”—language contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Efforts by pro-equality nations to insert language recognizing “various forms of the family” were rejected. \(^{44}\)

Many countries that would have preferred more inclusive family language nonetheless felt that politically they could not vote against “protecting families.” Kara, who previously worked for Arc International, a pro-LGBTQ organization, and now consults on human rights issues, says conservative civil society groups have helped mobilize the opposition, gathering diplomats together for meetings and doing trainings around language on the protection of the family. \(^{45}\) Jessica Stern, executive director of the pro-LGBTQ group OutRight Action International (formerly known as the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) says the inability to get inclusive language in the family “protection” resolution suggests that progressive advocates are losing ground in the discourse around “family.”

**THAT VIGOROUS ‘PRO-FAMILY’ COALITION**

In something analogous to the plethora of new right-wing coalitions created in the U.S. after the election of Barack Obama, \(^{46}\) the past decade has seen a flowering of collaboration between anti-LGBTQ organizations around the world in response to the push for LGBTQ human rights at the UN and at the national level. Newer groups join an extensive network of existing organizations and alliances, often with overlapping leadership structures, that have worked together for years to resist progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including access to abortion.

While it would be wrong to view this global culture war as simply an American export, it is nonetheless true that American Religious Right groups and leaders play a significant role in organizing these networks and using them to share information, resources, and strategies. For example, C-Fam’s Austin Ruse, whose group has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, \(^{48}\) has his fingers in many pots: he organized the new Civil Society for the Family coalition, \(^{49}\) helped organize an event with anti-LGBTQ countries at the UN, \(^{50}\) and helped launch the Political Network for Values, \(^{51}\) an effort to bring activists together with legislators who have the means to influence national policy directly. His group also runs a fellowship program for graduate students designed to train a new generation of “pro-family” activists. Similarly, Brian Brown not only serves as presi-
dent of both the National Organization for Marriage and the World Congress of Families, he also serves on the boards of CitizenGo, a conservative platform for mobilizing online activism, and the Political Network for Values.

The U.S.-based World Congress of Families has for two decades convened international summit meetings of “pro-family” groups—read anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ, and in some cases anti-sex-education and anti-contraception—for movement-strengthening cross-fertilization. In recent years, resistance to the advance of LGBTQ equality has become a top priority. At the 2016 WCF summit in Tbilisi, Georgia, German sociologist Gabriele Kuby attacked “the cultural revolutionists of our time” whose goals, she said, are now the agenda of the UN and the EU. According to Kuby, what had been a necessary struggle for women’s rights was “seized by radical mostly lesbian feminists and turned into a war against men, against marriage, against motherhood, and against the unborn child.” Kuby echoed the Catholic Church’s rhetorical war on transgender identity. “Because gender-theory is grounded in lies it must become totalitarian and natural understanding of one man in a voluntary union with one woman for life and “Governments and transnational entities should cease all propaganda in favor of ‘gender theory’ and ‘sexual orientation’ which has no basis in biological reality.”

As Christopher Stroop noted in the Winter 2016 issue of The Public Eye, Russian conservatives played a key role in the founding of the World Congress of Families, and the WCF maintains close ties with Russian Orthodox officials and financiers. Vladimir Putin has made strategic partnership with the Russian Orthodox Church a centerpiece of his “hard right turn” since 2012 and has used it to position Russia as the champion of Christian civilization and religious values against a secular and hedonistic West. This characterization has been embraced by American Religious Right leaders; WCF’s Larry Jacobs has said Russians “might be the Christian saviors of the world.”

After the U.S. imposed sanctions in the wake of Russia’s seizure of Crimea, the World Congress of Families withdrew formal sponsorship for its 2014 summit in Moscow, but the event went forward essentially as planned, in cooperation with the Orthodox church, and with the participation of WCF leaders.

Russia plays a leading role in the resistance to LGBTQ recognition in the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies, both by itself and as part of what one LGBTQ activist calls an “unholy trinity” of Russia, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Holy See. As a result, Religious Right leaders seem willing to overlook Putin’s increasing hostility to political dissent, freedom of the press, and religious freedom for non-Orthodox churches.

Russia is also a founding member of the Group of Friends of the Family, a network of 25 countries that was created in 2015 to push the United Nations to adhere to a traditional understanding of “the family” and to respect “national laws, traditions and religious and cultural background of the States Members of the United Nations related to the family and its role in society.” GoFF strenuously objected to the February 2016 issuance of LGBTQ-themed UN postage stamps, a project of the Free & Equal campaign. The group’s letter declared that the stamps promoted an agenda and priorities that “are vehemently and as a matter of strongly held principle opposed” by a majority of UN member states.

At a Group of Friends of the Family “high-level event” at the UN in May 2016, the Russian representative bragged about Putin’s promotion of
“traditional family values” and noted that the Commonwealth of Independent States, a confederation of former Soviet republics, has named 2017 the Year of the Family. He urged supporters of “traditional” families to be more vocal in opposing UN agencies that stray from their mandates and to be more active at the Human Rights Council.66

At the May event, the group kicked off a campaign promoting the importance of “pro-family” policies to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Family Research Council’s Peter Sprigg, a long-time anti-LGBTQ activist, decried attempts to create a new definition of marriage that he said would distance marriage from its roots in the “order of nature itself.” He declared that “it is not the place of government to redefine or interfere with the natural family.”67 Sprigg spoke at the 2015 World Congress of Families summit and at an anti-LGBTQ pre-WCF event at which he challenged the “gay identity paradigm” and said that compromise with the LGBTQ movement is “unwise” and “unsustainable.”68

Among the other non-governmental speakers at the Group of Friends of the Family event were Americans Jim Garlow, who made a national name for himself organizing church support for California’s anti-equality Prop 8; Gregory Mertz with CitizenGo and HazteOir; Helen Alvaré, a law professor and activist who served as a spokesperson for a 2014 Vatican conference on the complementarity of men and women; and pro-family activists Susan Yoshihara with CitizenGo and HazteOir; and Shenan Boquet with Human Life International. Also speaking were Imam Shamsi Ali of the Jamaica Muslim Center in Queens and Catholic Bishop John O’Hara of the Archdiocese of New York, who assured the group that they have the “enthusiastic” support of Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York.69

In addition to plenty of speeches, the GoFF event included some political theater as well: half-a-dozen children took turns reading “A Declaration on the Rights of Children and Their Families: A Call from the Children of the World,” a document promoted by the UN Family Rights Caucus.70 The Caucus, which claims members in more than 160 countries, was founded in 2008 “in response to the growing attacks on the family at the UN.”71 Its first event at the UN was a 2008 panel “promoting a family-based approach rather than a sexual rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS prevention.”72 It complains that pro-equality advocacy at the UN is “contributing to the family’s widespread disintegration.”73 Its Declaration asserts that every child has a right to a married mother and father and the “right to innocence and childhood” and it calls on countries and the UN system to “fully respect” the right of parents to guide the moral, religious, and sex education of their children.74

As I pointed out in Right Wing Watch, there is significant overlap between members of the Group of Friends of the Family and the countries identified by the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) as the worst in the world for religious freedom, including Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Malaysia, Egypt, and Iraq.75 C-Fam’s Austin Ruse praised Saudi Arabia and Sudan by name for having “saved” UN documents from unwanted language on the family; the USCIRF calls Saudi Arabia “uniquely repressive” and says Sudan’s government “represses and marginalizes the country’s minority Christian community.” Also among the “Friends of the Family” are countries where political and religious leaders have taken actions that threaten the lives and freedom of LGBTQ people, including Nigeria, Uganda, Indonesia, and Kyrgyzstan.76

The Group of Friends of the Family gathering at the UN was also a coming out party for a new network of nongovernmental organizations called “Civil Society for the Family.” The UN has already had a Family Rights Caucus, but apparently its focus was not specific enough for anti-LGBTQ activists; when C-Fam announced the formation of Civil Society for the Family in April, it called the new network “the first-pro-family coalition to explicitly push back against UN entities attempting to redefine the family to include same-sex relations.”77

The organizing committee for Civil Society for the Family has a strong American presence. Its members include C-Fam, the National Organization for Marriage, Institute for Family Policy, Human Life International (which gave birth to C-Fam), Family Research Council, Transatlantic Christian Council, Novae Terrae Foundation, HazteOir, CitizenGo, Derecho a Vivir, the European Center for Law and Justice, and the Institute for Legal Culture.78

Civil Society for the Family says that UN agencies and staff “may not expand their mandate unilaterally” or read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a way that includes “relations between individuals of the same sex and other social and legal arrangements that are not equivalent or analogous to the family.”79 In its platform, which it calls “The Family Articles,” CSF declares that same-sex relationships “are not entitled to the protections singularly reserved for the family in international law and policy.”80 Many of the American civil society organizations that participate in the World Congress of Families and these other global ventures share funding sources as well as leadership. The Center Against Religious Extremism has documented that the National Christian Foundation, “the leading domestic U.S. funding source for organizations and institutions involved in anti-LGBT rights activism,”81 plays a key role in funding “the global evangelical war on LGBT rights.”82 Nearly half of the speakers at the first six WCF summits represented groups funded by the National Christian Foundation, which is structured to allow funders to maintain anonymity while directing funds through the foundation to specific groups.83

For example, between 2001 and 2012, the National Christian Foundation gave more than $36 million to the Alliance Defending Freedom, the U.S.-based legal group that is expanding its reach around the globe.84 ADF’s logo could be seen prominently displayed behind some speakers at the Tbilisi World Congress of Families.85 In 2013 ADF co-sponsored a seminar on the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, which featured sociologist Mark Regnerus, author of an infamous—and widely condemned—study that suggested same-sex parenting is harmful to children;86
the following year ADF sent an alert charging that abortion rights advocates were using LGBTQ rights as a bargaining chip—in other words, trying to get governments to capitulate on “reproductive rights” language in return for keeping LGBTQ issues out of the SDGs. ADF, C-Fam and others co-sponsored a GoFF “side event” in February 2016 at which the Russian ambassador “expressed great disappointment that the family was not included in Agenda 2030.”

THE BATTLEGROUND AHEAD

In the fall, C-Fam was predicting that the 54-state African Group might try to challenge in the General Assembly the Human Right’s Council’s appointment of Thai diplomat Vitit Muntarbhorn to the newly created independent expert position. According to C-Fam, the OIC said none of its members would interact with the expert, a position a Russian delegate reportedly declared “does not exist as far as we are concerned.”

Pro-equality advocates are organizing as well. In July, at the Global LGBTI Human Rights Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, the U.S. welcomed and joined a new Equal Rights Coalition, a group of 30 nations founded by Uruguay and the Netherlands to “share, as appropriate, information between States on how best to advance the human rights of BTI persons, and to consider measures needed to protect and advance these rights, working in close engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including regional and multilateral organizations, civil society organisations, and the private sector.” The new collaboration may also be a forum for pro-equality nations to consider whether their public strategies have sometimes been harmful to activists in countries whose goal is basic protection of human rights, and where issues like marriage equality are not on the agenda.

Bruce Knott, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer who heads the Unitarian Universalist’s UN office and co-chairs the NGO Committee on Human Rights, says the leadership role that Latin American countries have played in recent years is vital. Given the accusations of “neocolonialism” and charges that the U.S. and Western Europe are forcing LG-BTQ equality on the rest of the world, he says, it’s crucial to have leadership from the Global South.

With the term of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon coming to a close at the end of the year it’s an open question whether his replacement, former prime minister of Portugal and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Gutieres, will devote personal energy and institutional resources to advancing LGBTQ human rights. The same question holds true for the next U.S. president; Barack Obama’s administration has made LGBTQ human rights a centerpiece of its foreign policy, and advocates say U.S. leadership has played a crucial role in recent years’ successes. At the 2015 World Congress of Families gathering in Salt Lake City, some African delegates urged Americans to elect a president who would abandon the Obama administration’s efforts. “If the U.S. political commitment to advancing LGBTQ human rights wanes,” says OutRight’s Jessica Stern, “it will have repercussions that will reverberate around the world.”

Free & Equal’s Charles Radcliffe says he believes the institutional commitment to LGBTQ human rights at the UN is more than skin-deep. More than 100 countries have implemented legal changes in response to UN human rights recommendations regarding LGBTQ people, he said, noting that last year a dozen UN agencies “endorsed an unprecedented statement committing themselves to work with countries to address discrimination and violence against LGBTQ and intersex people and to protect, help and listen to LGBTI civil society.”

“We’re now past the point of no return,” said Radcliffe. But his opponents are committed to turning back the tide.

After this summer’s vote in the Human Rights Council on the independent expert resolution, Arvind Narra at Arc International, a pro-LGBTQ organization, said that the concerted efforts to amend and weaken the independent expert resolution reflect that “the world we live in is one where homophobia and transphobia is a deeply significant system of power” and should be taken as “a warning of the nature of the struggle ahead.” Indeed, across the world, anti-LGBTQ governments are not only restricting the rights of LGBTQ people, but are also clamping down on civil society organizations that advocate for equality.

In his remarkably bitter opening remarks to the World Congress of Families event in Georgia this year, host Levan Vasadze, a businessman and conservative activist, attacked the West for funding nongovernmental organizations that he said attack the church and family. “No Christian family,” he said, had been “left unhumiliated” by a system that is “poisoning” the minds of the younger generation and breeding a “spirit of anti-traditional cynicism” through the “totalitarian dictatorship of liberals” in media and educational organizations.

At the same World Congress of Families meeting, Brian Brown said there is rising discontent with tolerance for abortion and “cultural imperialism” on LGBTQ and “family” issues. “Our task,” he said, “is to take that discontent and direct it toward the fashioning of a thriving, growing, and vibrant global movement.” Brown complained that the pro-family movement is outspent and called for supporters from around the world who “understand what is at stake and have the courage and charity to sacrifice their wealth to change history.” German sociologist Gabriele Kuby, author of The Global Sexual Revolution: The Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom, had similar words for the gathering: “Let us rise. Let us resist.”

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International Backlash, p. 10


7. Ibid.


11. Ibid.


19. Ibid.

20. “Combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity,” UN Office of the High Commissi...
80. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. See, for example, Fr. Josiah Trenham, “Gay Iconoclasm: Holding the Line Against the Radical LGBT Agenda,” YouTube Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNXe4P6dhw.
95. Stern interview.
96. Radcliffe interview.
97. Ibid.
98. Arvid Narrain, statement by email.
101. Ibid.