

April 3, 2020

Dear U.S. State Department Commission on Unalienable Rights,

As young activists with the International Youth Leadership Council (IYLC), a project of Advocates for Youth, we write to express our extreme concern with this Commission and its work.

Advocates for Youth (“Advocates”) works alongside thousands of young people here in the U.S. and around the globe as they fight for sexual health, rights, and justice. Advocates partners with youth leaders, adult allies, and youth-serving organizations to advocate for policies and champion programs that recognize young people’s health and rights. Advocates’ Youth Activist Network, of which the International Youth Leadership Council is a part of, is currently 75,000 strong on 1,200 campuses and in hundreds of communities in the U.S. and more than 120 countries around the world.

Based on reports coming from human rights advocates and views expressed by several of the Commission’s members, we fear that the final report produced by the Commission will have dire and unacceptable consequences for both U.S. foreign policy and international human rights more generally. We ask that, for the good of human rights around the world, the Commission be immediately disbanded and its work ceased.

Our main concern is that this Commission is an avenue for the State Department to narrow the scope of U.S. obligations under international human rights law by creating a hierarchy of human rights. The Commission is attempting to prioritize so-called religious freedom over the rights of women, LGBTQI+ people, and youth around the world. This hierarchy would reverse the hard-fought advances of human rights over recent years that work to protect marginalized people from oppressive systems around the world.

By imposing a hierarchy of nefarious values on an international understanding of human rights, this Commission seeks to impose its neocolonial agenda on the rest of the world. The Commission’s role in undermining the human rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people will most directly impact marginalized communities in the Global South – that is, the very people the government should be working harder to secure the rights of. This will disproportionately impact people from low-income communities, who already lack access to resources. A hierarchical system, which would be imposed by the Commission, stifles the ability for effective collaboration.

As members of the International Youth Leadership Council, we work closely on issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights as it relates to U.S. foreign policy. This Commission and the work that it does are direct affronts to our values and what we know to be good foreign policy.

We demand foreign policy that reaffirms the U.S. government's commitment to the internationally agreed-upon framework of human rights; foreign policy that makes clear that the rights recognized in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are indivisible, interdependent, and enjoyed by all people, regardless of where they come from, what they look like, or who they love. It is in the U.S. government's national interest to make the promotion and protection of human rights a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

One person's rights are not more important than another's. This Commission's work to date does not reflect this. As such, we ask that this Commission as it currently exists be immediately disbanded.

Sincerely,

The International Youth Leadership Council
Advocates for Youth