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U.S. Sends 'Anti-Gay Hate' Group to U.N., Fueling Fears Over LGBTQ Rights

by REUTERS



The American flag flies with other nation's flag outside of the United Nations on January 26, 2017 in New York City. Spencer Platt / Getty Images

The United States has sent a lobbying group listed as a "hate group" by civil rights activists in its delegation to key United Nations meetings, advocates said on Wednesday, fueling fears over rolling back gay rights.

The Center for Family and Human Rights (C-FAM) was named this week by the U.S. State Department to attend the U.N.'s Commission on the Status of Women, an annual set of high-level meetings on women's equality and empowerment.

C-FAM has been listed as an anti-LGBTQ hate group by nonprofit civil rights group the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) for at least five years, said Heidi Beirich, director of the SPLC's Intelligence Project.

"The way you get on our anti-gay hate list is basically if you demonize the gay population," Beirich told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "That's how they ended up on the list.

"The move comes as decisions by President Donald Trump's new administration raise fears of a rollback of LGBTQ rights.

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Trump has voiced support for LGBTQ rights, but his administration has revoked federal guidelines that let transgender students to use bathrooms of their choice. Vice President Mike Pence has expressed staunch opposition to gay rights.

Neither C-FAM nor the State Department responded immediately to requests for comment.

C-FAM's longtime leader Austin Ruse is often quoted saying he supports the criminalization of homosexuality, which he calls "harmful to public health and morals," Beirich said.

Articles by Ruse have accused the administration of former President Barack Obama of promoting a "homosexual agenda".

Gay rights made headway under Obama's administration.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2015, and Obama also issued regulations prohibiting health insurers from denying coverage based on gender identity, among other measures.

On its website, C-FAM says its mission is "to defend life and family at international institutions".

Beirich said the inclusion of C-FAM "is taking the State Department in a very ugly direction" and failing to address the violence and discrimination faced by LGBTQ people in some places.

"When you take this anti-gay tone openly, that provides an opening for people to continue those horrible practices," she said.

"We want the State Department to be a beacon of freedom and safety for communities, and this is the opposite of that."

The U.S. delegation to the U.N. meetings is headed by U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, and C-FAM is represented by Lisa Correnti, its executive vice president, the State Department said in a statement.

Jessica Stern, executive director of OutRight Action International, an LGBTQ rights group, said C-FAM "regularly releases homophobic vitriol" on its website.

"Maybe the violent mentality that got C-FAM labeled a hate group successfully panders to their base, but the U.S. government must ensure protection for the world's most vulnerable people," Stern said in a statement.

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