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INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION

This report is submitted by the Sexual Rights Initiative and an anonymous human rights defender from the United States of America

The Sexual Rights Initiative is a coalition of national and regional organisations based in Canada, India, Egypt, and Argentina that work together to advance human rights related to gender and sexuality at the United Nations.

Contact: Anthea Taderera, Advocacy Advisor – UPR,

E-mail: anthea@srigeneva.org **Tel:** +41767656477,

Website: www.sexualrightsinitiative.org

Address: Rue de Monthoux 25, Geneva, 1201 Switzerland



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Executive Summary

1. This report is submitted by the Sexual Rights Initiative and an anonymous human rights defender from and living in the United States. It focuses on a series of human rights violations, including those related to sexual and reproductive health and rights policy and practice (and related concerns); and violations of international norms and non-compliance with human rights obligations, including those related to non-discrimination and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.
2. Violations do not fall equally and are magnified for those who experience marginalization rooted in systemic racism, classism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, oppressions related to gender and sexuality and political belief, thus engaging the right to non-discrimination based on race, national and social origin, and other statuses.
3. Despite some advances in federal non discrimination policy in the period 2020-2024, violations outlined in this report represent incomplete fulfillment of previous UPR recommendations and current and already-existing non-compliance with international human rights law. In terms of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the 2022 Supreme Court rescinding of rights related to abortion is one of the most critical developments since the last review period.
4. Within this submission, many of the failures to meet international human rights obligations are related to the current federal administration and actions taken since January 20, 2025.
5. This report is submitted within the first 100 days of the current federal administration. Already, there are explicit and catastrophic rights concerns for those inside and outside US borders, including those resulting from “executive orders” issued by the US President. The suspension of foreign development assistance for health projects is one such example. Many of these executive orders contain content that is authoritarian in nature and which threatens international human rights law, humanitarian law and the US Constitution.
6. In this period, there has been an alarming reliance on mobilization of “moral panics”, by creating and deploying discriminatory stereotypes for political or economic outcome. These have rested, in part, on anti-transgender, anti-gay, anti-immigrant, anti-Black, anti-Latinx, and anti-Palestinian/Arab/Muslim sentiment.¹
7. These stereotypes have been deployed in conjunction with clampdowns on lawful protest, academic freedom and threats to rights related to education, information, assembly, expression, and freedom of opinion and belief - with risks to both individuals and institutions.²

¹ American Civil Liberties Union, <https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/the-human-toll-of-trumps-anti-trans-crusade>. This article notes the impact of the Executive Order that restricts access to gender-affirming medical care for trans people under the age of 19.

² CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/14/us/mahmoud-khalil-columbia-pro-palestinian-protests/index.html>

8. Efforts to restrict “diversity, equity and inclusion” in academic environments, health care, and even in private sector settings have resulted in attempted erasure of histories of marginalized groups and also significant loss of funding for programming and service provision. Books have been banned, curricula censored and websites “scrubbed” of terminology related to both celebration of histories and legacies of oppression. Individuals involved in certain human rights and anti-discrimination efforts have lost employment and have been targeted in other ways, including, in some instances, for arrest and possible deportation.³

MULTILATERALISM, FUNDING, GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY:

9. The current federal administration has rescinded membership and funding from various UN entities. In 2025, the Trump administration has rescinded its membership in the Human Rights Council, and it is currently unclear whether the administration intends to be reviewed under the Universal Periodic Review, or if it will contribute to a growing trend among states of undermining multilateral human rights mechanisms through non-participation.
10. This administration has again suspended regular and voluntary contributions to WHO, UNAIDS, and UNFPA, among other sites.⁴ This suspension of funding has a severe impact on those agencies’ abilities to function and provide sometimes life saving humanitarian aid and services.⁵ In 2021, under the Biden administration, the US reinstated funding to UNRWA that had been suspended in 2018. In 2024, under the same administration, funding was again suspended, threatening the lives and health of Palestinian populations.⁶

LIMITS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, RIGHTS AND SERVICES:

11. Under the last review, the United States received and accepted a number of recommendations that are unfortunately still very pertinent:
 - 26.299 Lift funding restrictions on United States foreign assistance to promote women’s full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (Norway);

³ Students and faculty at various universities have been punished for their (lawful) pro-Palestinian advocacy and expression. Mahmoud Khalil and Rumeysa Ozturk, for instance, were apprehended by federal immigration officials near their academic sites, arrested and placed in detention. Both are living in the United States legally (either with student visas or as permanent resident “green card” holders).

⁴ UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/02/1160631> .US cuts to UNFPA are estimated to be \$377 million.

⁵ UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/03/1161066>;

⁶ Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/us-unrwa-funding-already-halted-2024-not-by-trump-2025-order-2025-01-28/> In relation to the UN Human Rights Council and UNRWA, In February of 2025, the White House issued a statement that the “United States will not satisfy any claims to pay 2025 assessments or prior arrears by these organizations”. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>

- 26.303 Take action to support equitable access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services, and review policies that effectively limit foreign assistance for sexual and reproductive health and rights services abroad (Canada);
 - 26.311 Repeal the Helms Amendment and the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance Policy and, in the interim, allow United States foreign assistance to be used, at a minimum, for safe abortion in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment (Netherlands);
12. The Government of the US is obliged to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of all people within its jurisdiction. This explicitly includes guaranteeing substantive and equal access to abortion care in all US states. Rights to equality, non-discrimination, health, information, dignity, security of person and bodily autonomy remain under threat and are unequally protected across US states.
 13. Most critically since the last review, the 2022 US Supreme Court decision “Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization” severely limited many women’s rights to access legal, safe and accessible abortions.⁷ The rescinding of federal abortion-related protections marked a backsliding from a set of rights previously granted, and created conditions in which some pregnant people, health care providers, advocates and even those providing transportation for the procedure are now subjected to potential and actual surveillance and criminal penalty.⁸ This legal decision also gives license for people and businesses to discriminate, including through the use of religious “opt outs” such as those for conscientious objection.⁹ Coercing childbirth flags significant concerns regarding cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and has been found to constitute torture in certain instances.¹⁰
 14. The decision to suspend federal grants for international development assistance and domestic health and education projects and service provision is already having a severe impact on the right to health, as in, for instance, the disruption in HIV/AIDS services in Kenya and other countries.¹¹ The executive order “Reevaluating and Realigning US Foreign Aid” of January 20, 2025, which suspends funding for USAID and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), is dangerously coercive and creates immediate threats to life and public health in relation to HIV/AIDS (as well as Ebola, tuberculosis and transmission of other communicable diseases).
 15. The aid suspension is intended to allow for review by US officials of compliance with broader US foreign and domestic policy goals and ideological interests, many of which are now informed by religious and other forms of extremism. With anti abortion, homophobic and transphobic filters for this review, the suspension of international development assistance is impacting the rights of

⁷ US Supreme Court decision, 2022; https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf

⁸ Guttmacher, <https://www.guttmacher.org/2024/05/clear-and-growing-evidence-dobbs-harming-reproductive-health-and-freedom>

⁹ “Religious freedom” opt outs should not be used to discriminate and impede enjoyment of human rights -

¹⁰ UN Human Rights Committee / OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/ecuador-and-nicaragua-forced-pregnancy-and-motherhood-violated-rights-girl>

¹¹ UNAIDS; https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2025/april/20250404_Kenya_fs

LGBTI people, people living with HIV/AIDS, and those seeking access to sexual and reproductive health services, among others.¹²

16. Sexual and reproductive rights encompass many other interrelated human rights concerns. These include rights to dignity, information, health, privacy, equality and the right to benefit from scientific progress, among others. They are also intrinsically linked to rights related to expression, assembly, and freedom of opinion and belief and to be free from discrimination and violence. When lifesaving information is suppressed, or any validating information about lives of people in marginalized communities is denied, acts of discrimination and violence may result.

ANTI DISCRIMINATION, ACADEMIC FREEDOM, RIGHTS TO EDUCATION AND INFORMATION, AND “DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION”

17. The United States received a number of recommendation on addressing (structural) discrimination on the basis of inter alia, gender and gender identity, race, sexual orientation and sex characteristics including the following recommendations that in supported in full or in part:
- 26.111 Adopt measures to combat structural discrimination (Argentina);
 - 26.114 Resolutely combat all forms of discrimination by guaranteeing equitable access to justice, medical care and quality education, as well as by ensuring that the use of force and firearms by the police is in compliance with human rights (Switzerland);
 - 26.140 Strengthen activities and laws aimed at eliminating discrimination in society and other forms of intolerance against minorities and other groups, including based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity (Iceland);
 - 26.147 Guarantee the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and put an end to the discrimination they suffer (France);
18. The current administration has relied on the creation or affirmation of “moral panics” in order to stoke fear for political or economic outcome. Transgender people have borne the brunt of one thread of this discriminatory strategy: the President has used his executive authority to condemn trans women in sports, and to deny gender-affirming medical care for trans people under the age of 19.¹³ These policies dovetail with others that function at the state level, where candidates for elections have put forth discriminatory and fear-stoking ideas about trans people in relation to bathroom use and women in sports.
19. “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” (DEI) efforts are, at their core, anti-discrimination efforts. They reflect commitments to naming and undoing centuries of oppressions including racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of hatreds. At their heart, they represent efforts to challenge and

¹² Human Rights Watch; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/10/us-lifesaving-programs-remain-suspended-despite-waivers>; Williams Institute; <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/foreign-aid-eo-impact/>.

¹³ White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/keeping-men-out-of-womens-sports/>; ACLU, <https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/the-human-toll-of-trumps-anti-trans-crusade>; NPR, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/10/nx-s1-5292390/trump-transgender-gender-affirming-care-hospital>; Many states in the US regulate trans people and their bathroom use, with restrictions now in place in various state government buildings and even the US House chamber. <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-politics-and-policy/speaker-mike-johnson-maintains-house-transgender-bathroom-ban-rcna186669>

rectify inequality, injustice and invisibility, and to highlight the realities of marginalized groups of people. DEI, and generally, anti-discrimination efforts are wide-ranging, and take place in many arenas, including but not limited to cultural and arts institutions (in relation to programming), school systems (in relation to diversifying curricula and student / faculty populations), libraries (in relation to collections held and available), health sites (in relation to making services culturally sensitive) and in the private sector (in relation to hiring).¹⁴

20. Anti-diversity /equity and inclusion efforts have the intention of suppressing information, curtailing public discussion, and limiting discourse regarding sexuality, gender, race, colonial history and other social factors. Anti-DEI efforts are generally interpreted as racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and anti-immigrant and can be motivated by extreme prejudice and religious extremism. They can also be motivated by long term economic interests, including ultimately destroying the reputation of and then privatizing public education, which has profound impact on the rights of young people to education and information and their ability to subsequently enjoy other human rights. On January 20, 2025 (the first day of this incoming administration), an executive order was issued entitled “Ending Radical and Wasteful DEI Programs and Preferencing.”¹⁵
21. In April of 2025, the Department of Education threatened that federal education funding would be withdrawn from public K-12 schools unless they eliminate DEI programs. The Department gave states ten days to sign and return letters certifying compliance with the order.¹⁶
22. Approaches to censor and render invisible non-white, non-heteronormative and non-male histories take many forms. Information about the history of slavery or about LGBT families, for instance, has been censored at state and federal levels through recent “book bans”, withholding of funding for libraries, and “taking over” management of arts institutions such as the John F Kennedy Center.¹⁷ The anti-censorship organization PEN America noted that the US state of Florida had banned over 4,500 books. Bans tend to target publications that feature stories about people of color and LGBT people.¹⁸ These efforts to censor and suppress publications are in direct violation of a series of interlinked rights, including those related to discrimination, equality, expression, opinion and belief, education, information, culture, and others related to academic freedom.

¹⁴ This is not a comprehensive list of examples.

¹⁵ The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>

¹⁶ National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/03/nx-s1-5350978/trump-administration-warns-schools-about-dei-programs> . The Department of Education also created an online “End DEI” web portal. <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-launches-end-dei-portal> . This is built around the idea that DEI programs focus on “irrelevant” or otherwise “dangerous” topics such as critical race theory and that DEI programming promotes racism (against white people).

¹⁷ Trump fired the head of the prestigious Kennedy Center and named himself as the new Chair. He also had portraits of himself and his wife hung in the building, where no Presidents other than John F Kennedy are recognized. The Hill, <https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/5216045-ric-grenell-kennedy-center-trump-dei/> ; Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-attend-kennedy-center-board-meeting-its-new-chair-2025-03-17/> .

¹⁸ The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/27/banned-books-people-of-color-lgbtq> . Central Florida Public Media, <https://www.cfpublic.org/education/2024-11-11/florida-list-banned-books-schools> .

23. The Special Rapporteur on education has noted risks to academic freedom in her 2024 report, A/HRC/56/58. She notes of the US, “[laws] prohibiting classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity and, in other instances, officials have removed books that address gender and sexuality from schools and public libraries. In addition, over 20 States have enacted restrictions against critical race theory, the teaching of structural racism and gender inequity. Restrictions have grown to encompass Black feminism, queer theory, intersectionality and other frameworks that address structural inequality.”¹⁹
24. To force compliance with the White House anti-DEI executive order, the federal administration has also put in place sweeping efforts to censor online content of institutions and organizations receiving federal funds. It has demanded erasure of specific text from websites that included the use of hundreds of words, no matter the context, in order to protect federal grants.²⁰ These terms include: diversity, climate crisis, key populations, activism, gender and many others in an effort to censor, erase history and with it decades of social, scientific and anti discrimination progress.
25. The US Department of Defense (DOD) called for a “digital content refresh” in its public platforms, and required removal and archiving of DoD news articles, photos, and videos promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), including content related to critical race theory, “gender ideology”, and identity-based programs.²¹
26. At federal and state levels, there have been violations of rights related to culture, arts and expression, including destruction of artworks and defunding of programming commemorating anti racism struggles and LGBT legacies, and anti discrimination, generally. For instance, the commemorative Black Lives Matter Plaza mural located in Washington, DC, and one block from the White House, was bulldozed in March of 2025.²² In 2011, the Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights (A/HRC/17/38) and in 2009, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (general comment 21) noted the significance of access to cultural heritage and the interconnectedness of obligations to respect and protect freedoms, cultural heritage and cultural diversity.²³
27. Rights of activists and human rights defenders are also actively being suppressed, with particular concerns about policing on college campuses and collusion between school administrations and the federal government (in some instances as a result of federal threats to withhold significant funding). Faculty, staff and students are experiencing surveillance, harassment and in some instances arrest and threat of extra judicial deportation because of

¹⁹ A/HRC/56/58, esp paras 72-74. and Department of Education, <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-takes-action-eliminate-dei>

²⁰ PEN America lists the terms at <https://pen.org/banned-words-list/> but notes that this list is dynamic. Even terms such as “dietary guidelines”, “autism”, “vaccines”, and “peanut allergies” were cut. The demand is so coercive and sweeping that even the Pentagon (connected to the Department of Defense) had to remove the name of the WWII airplane “Enola Gay,” which is the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb.

²¹ US Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4079501/pentagon-releases-digital-content-refresh-memorandum/>.

²² This public artwork was developed in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd and was meant to be an ongoing reminder of police brutality. Associated Press News, <https://apnews.com/article/black-lives-matter-white-house-trump-bowser-f130daeb762e438fc8eddd3dd4da7982>

²³ A/HRC/17/38 para 2 and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment 21.

their political engagement, and in particular because of support related to Palestine. Activists participating in peaceful protest, or even those who publish support for Palestinian, Arab or Muslim communities, are at particular risk for retribution.²⁴ Arrests, detention and deportation of those exercising rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and to opinion and belief should all be considered cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment that can possibly amount to torture, in violation of both international law and also the US Detainee Treatment Act, adopted by US Congress in 2005.²⁵ Rights related to organizing and protest are also being compromised by the federal government forcing institutional adherence to an overbroad “working definition” of anti-Semitism associated with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). This definition too easily conflates criticism of Israeli state actions with anti-Semitism. Defenders should always have the ability to challenge actions of and human rights violations by states without being accused of being discriminatory themselves.²⁶

Recommendations

We call on the United States of America to:

1. Rescind the “Helms Amendment” / Mexico City policy / Global Gag Rule, thereby allowing unrestricted funding for family planning related to abortion.
2. Restore all contracted foreign assistance funding for matters related to all components of health and development, including sexual and reproductive health.
3. Ensure that any “religious freedom” legal arguments for groups or individuals are not used to justify the discriminatory denying of services, care, goods, or commodities. Federal protections against discrimination should be strengthened and should explicitly preclude exemptions that allow discrimination.
4. Restore suspended federal funding to domestic academic institutions, libraries, health sites and programs, cultural / arts institutions and other entities which have been targeted in anti “diversity, equity and inclusion” efforts.
5. Remove anti-“diversity, equity and inclusion” mandates that seek to eradicate or limit programming, expression and service provision. Remove censoring restrictions on terminology used on websites of organizations in academic, health, cultural and other sectors; protect rights related to anti-discrimination, assembly, opinion and belief.
6. Ensure academic freedom and ensure rights to information, to benefit from scientific progress, to education, and to expression and assembly are enjoyed by all. Protect student, instructor and staff rights to freedom of assembly.

²⁴ CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/06/us/trump-crackdown-university-protests-student-activism-hnk/index.html> ; The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/05/mahmoud-khalil-columbia-university> and <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/24/university-professors-discipline-palestine-support>.

²⁵ Detainee Treatment Act, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-489/pdf/COMPS-489.pdf>; see esp. Section 1003.

²⁶ The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which has been endorsed globally by hundreds of Holocaust scholars, presents a constructive alternative to the politicized IHRA definition of anti-Semitism which has been weaponized to restrict rights. <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>; NB: this submission is from a self identified Jewish American.

7. Restore full funding to the UN mechanisms and bodies from which funds have been withheld, including UNFPA, UNRWA and WHO.
8. Suspend and release those subjected to illegal arrests, detentions and deportations and hold accountable those responsible for ordering and facilitating these processes. Release Mahmoud Khalil and Rumeysa Ozturk and others arrested and /or detained for political beliefs and expression.
9. Suspend use of and coercion to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antiSemitism. Employ the Jerusalem Declaration definition of antiSemitism as an alternative. Allow and cease punishment for relevant criticism of human rights violations perpetrated by the government of Israel and all other states, and related state and non state actors.