



WORLD NEWS

JUNE 3, 2010 / 9:08 PM / UPDATED 13 YEARS AGO

U.N. committee moves to keep out gay-lesbian NGO

By Louis Charbonneau



UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - A United Nations committee that decides which nongovernmental organizations can be accredited to the world body moved on Thursday to keep out the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

The group, which had applied for “consultative status” at the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) three years ago, is an international NGO and advocacy group focusing on protecting the rights of homosexuals and lesbians worldwide.

Diplomats from Western nations that support gay rights complained that Egypt and other developing states that have been criticized by rights groups for discriminating against gays and lesbians prevented the committee from voting on whether to accredit the group, thereby leaving it in limbo.

“IGLHRC is disappointed by the vote of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to block action on our application,” Cary Alan Johnson, head of the New York-based group, said in a statement to Reuters.

The U.N. NGO committee has 19 members, among them the United States and Britain, who supported the NGO. Among those who voted against it were Egypt, Sudan, Qatar,

Pakistan, China, Russia, Angola, Burundi and Sudan. Turkey abstained.

Johnson said it was “a clear case of discrimination against an organization because it defends the human rights of LGBT people around the world and promotes non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.”

LGBT refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

The U.S. delegation defended the work of IGLHRC (www.iglhrc.org).

“This NGO is committed to combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity,” the U.S. statement said. “It has contributed to valuable research on HIV/AIDs and its work is well known to this committee.”

A Western diplomat told Reuters that “unfortunately we didn’t have the votes” on the committee to overcome opposition from countries like Egypt, Qatar, Sudan and others. The diplomat added that IGLHRC clearly fulfills all the criteria for U.N. accreditation.

The British delegation issued a statement expressing its “deep regret” for the decision to reject a U.S. proposal to take action on IGLHRC’s application for a U.N. accreditation. The British statement said the move not to accredit the group was proposed by Egypt on behalf of African countries.

“This act of simple discrimination runs contrary to the principles of the U.N., of ECOSOC and of the NGO Committee,” it said.

One envoy told Reuters on condition of anonymity that the United States and Europeans would push for the U.N. Economic and Social Council itself to move to accredit the group, a strategy that he said would have a better chance of success.

Editing by Eric Walsh

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