

**Ambassador Samantha Power
LGBT Arria
August 24, 2015**

Word count: 1500
Est. time: 11+ mins

Today we are making UN history. The UN Security Council has never before had a meeting on LGBT issues.

It is an honor to co-host this meeting with Chile, which continues to be a strong advocate for LGBT rights and more generally for empowering civil society around the world.

Let me welcome our briefers. Deputy-Secretary General Jan Eliasson, along with Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, has worked tirelessly to advance LGBT rights both within the UN and across the world. Jessica Stern is here representing the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), an NGO doing critically important work to protect LGBT persons, including in the places we will discuss today. And finally, we are so grateful to have “Adnan” and Subhi Nahas speak to us today. You will have the opportunity to hear from them directly, but let me say a few words about each.

“Adnan” is not Adnan’s real name – it is a pseudonym he is using to hide his identity. Adnan fled northern Iraq after being marked for death by ISIL because he is gay. Adnan is a client of the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project, an extraordinary organization that has helped facilitate his participation today. He still fears that he could be attacked by ISIL if identified, which is the reason he is speaking to the Council today by phone rather than by video link. Out of concern for Adnan’s safety, I would like to request that no audio or video recordings be made during this event.

Subhi Nahas – a gay man and LGBT advocate from Syria – was forced to flee his

country after receiving death threats from Jabat al Nusra. Even after fleeing to neighboring Lebanon and then Turkey, he continued to receive threats, this time from ISIL. He now lives in the United States.

Adnan and Subhi's experiences are distinct, but they share key parallels. Both faced discrimination, threats and attacks before violent extremist groups seized power in their communities. Both were marked for death for being gay, and knew LGBT individuals who were killed. And both had to flee their homes because of who they are.

Their cases are not outliers, but rather part of a pattern of systematic abuse. Yet until now, the targeting of LGBT persons like Adnan and Subhi by ISIL has received scant international attention. Today, we are taking a necessary step towards remedying that oversight.

ISIL does not try to hide its crimes against LGBT persons – it broadcasts them for all the world to see. Many of us have seen the videos. ISIL parading a man through the streets and beating him – for being gay. ISIL marching men to the tops of buildings and throwing them to their deaths – for being gay. In one of these videos, allegedly from Syria, we are told that the victim was found to be having a gay affair. He is blindfolded, walked up stairs of a building, and then heaved off its roof. His suffering did not end there. The victim miraculously survived the fall, only to be stoned to death by a mob that waited for him below. Kids in the crowd were reportedly encouraged to grab stones and take part.

The mob in this instance carries an important lesson: while the targeting of LGBT individuals in the region appears to have worsened as ISIL's power has grown, such violence and hatred existed well before the group's dramatic rise, and extends far beyond its members. The victim in that grotesque video may have been thrown to his death by ISIL, but he was ultimately killed by stone-throwing individuals who did not belong to the group. Similarly, before Subhi Nahas was forced to flee his

country because of death threats from Jabhat al Nusra, he was targeted for being gay by Syrian government soldiers. And before ISIL came to power, Adnan was repeatedly attacked by gangs of thugs for being gay, once being beaten so severely he could hardly walk.

Today, we are coming together as a Security Council to condemn these acts, to demand they stop, and to commit to one day bringing the perpetrators to justice. That unified condemnation matters. This is first time in history that the Council has held a meeting on the victimization of LGBT persons. It is the first time we are saying, in a single voice, that it is wrong to target people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It is a historic step. And it is long overdue.

But crucial and unprecedented as this step is, condemning ISIL's violent and systematic targeting of LGBT individuals is the easiest step we can take today. Because while today's session is focused on the crimes against LGBT persons committed by ISIL, we know the scope of this problem is much broader. Consider the report released in June by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which found that thousands of people have been killed or brutally injured worldwide because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the report, "the overall picture remains one of continuing, pervasive, violent abuse, harassment and discrimination affecting LGBT and intersex persons in all regions...often perpetrated with impunity."

We are all horrified by ISIL's videos of men being thrown to their death. But what is it about these crimes that so shocks our collective conscience? At its essence – it is the denial of a person's most basic right because of who they are. It is ISIL deciding that, because of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, they do not deserve to live.

Yet if these crimes feel utterly unjust and wrong to us, we must also ask: Why is it acceptable to deny LGBT persons other human rights? Why should LGBT persons be

imprisoned for who they are? Why should police be allowed to refuse to investigate attacks or threats against LGBT persons? Why should we accept LGBT persons being turned away from schools or jobs or social services because of who they love? The answer to all of these questions is the same: We should not accept it. But too often we do.

No religious beliefs justify throwing individuals off of buildings or stoning them to death because of who they love. No cultural values excuse refusing to investigate a killing, assault or death threat because the victim is gay. These are not Western-imposed rights, or the North trying to force its values on the South.

Yet in too many parts of the world, denying LGBT rights is still seen as moral and just. Laws are used to criminalize LGBT persons, rather than to prosecute the people who violate their rights. That must change.

That change begins by working to stop attacks against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. And by taking steps to ensure that those who commit these heinous and brutal crimes are held accountable, whether the perpetrators belong to ISIL or police forces or members of our communities.

But stopping violence is not enough. We must strive to defend the rights of LGBT persons wherever they are denied, including within the United Nations. To give just one example, as recently as five years ago the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission – the NGO led by Jessica Stern, one of our guest briefers – was denied UN accreditation in the UN NGO Committee because of the issues they work on. As a result, Jessica and members of her NGO were not even allowed to attend meetings like this one, much less speak at one. Today, because of a successful campaign led by some member states with support from civil society, Jessica's group has been accredited – and she is speaking at one of those meetings. Nonetheless, groups like Jessica's are still being denied accreditation on similar grounds.

The effort to defend the equal rights of LGBT persons must also be waged within every one of our countries, even those where important progress has been made – including my own. For just as this year we have made tremendous strides in advancing LGBT rights in the United States, we are under no illusion that the work is finished. Every one of our countries can and must do more to advance these rights domestically.

Let me conclude. This year we mark seventy years since the creation of the United Nations. It is fair to say that in writing the charter, the drafters did not consider LGBT rights part of their conception of equal rights. But if we read the Charter today – and in particular its call to “reaffirm faith... in the dignity and worth of the human person” – it is impossible not to see a call for all of us to affirm LGBT rights. It is impossible not to see individuals like Adnan and Subhi as having that same inherent dignity and worth. And it is impossible not to take up the struggle for their rights as our own, as we have other great human rights struggles over the last seven decades. Today, we take a small but important step in assuming that work. It must not be our last.

Thank you.

And with that, let me turn it over to Ambassador Barros-Melet of Chile, the United States’ co-chair for today’s event.