April 9, 2014

The Honorable Deborah Birx
Ambassador at large
Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator
Washington, D.C.

Dear Ambassador Birx:

As physician scientists involved with the U.S. global response to AIDS, we recognize the threats to the rights, safety and health of individuals living and working in Uganda, and to the success of health services there that have been posed by the recent enactment of anti-homosexuality legislation, and last week by the raid on a U.S. military research and clinical facility there. We are writing now to reiterate two points that we and some 900 of our colleagues have made earlier in a letter to President Obama:

- That the U.S. must respond in concrete and unyielding terms to the Ugandan’s government unlawful behavior and codification of a law that represents a major violation of human rights.
- And that his response cannot take the form of a retreat from our medical and ethical obligations to those who depend on U.S. support for their lives.

We are writing now because we understand that the Administration is considering withdrawing HIV resources from Uganda, including funding that provides lifesaving antiretroviral treatment to tens of thousands of Ugandan citizens. We strongly oppose this approach, which would be a disaster for individual and public health. With little evidence that President Museveni and his government will ensure that lifesaving HIV care is preserved for its citizens, the greatest harm would be done to those already most threatened, with the withdrawal of services to support the health and well-being of gay Ugandans who depend upon U.S. funded prevention and treatment services. The enactment of the anti-homosexuality legislation makes it clear that relevant and sensitive prevention services for marginalized populations including men who have sex with men will not be made available.

While we appreciate the challenges and the security concerns now being faced by U.S. government personnel and non-governmental organizations funded by the United States, we cannot abandon the HIV response in Uganda, now in its eleventh year, and retreat from our commitment to the Ugandan people.
Security challenges in U.S. global health programs are hardly unprecedented, and as a nation, we continue to move forward with childhood vaccination programs and other initiatives in dangerous parts of the world.

A U.S. retreat from Uganda on HIV/AIDS would spell a victory for the Ugandan government and its homophobic and anti-human rights posture.

Sincerely yours,

Joel Gallant, MD
Chair, Board of Directors
HIV Medicine Association

Kenneth Mayer, MD
Co-Chair
IDSA Center for Global Health Policy