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International News

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

U.N. hears statement on LGBT rights

U.S., Islamic nations and Vatican had refused to sign on

UNITED NATIONS — A statement jointly sponsored by France and The Netherlands, and supported by most Western nations, condemning anti-gay discrimination was heard at the U.N. on Dec. 18 amid stiff opposition from Islamic nations, the Vatican and an absent U.S.

Signed by all European Union members, as well as Japan, Australia, Mexico and dozens other nations, the statement called upon nations to “reaffirm the principle of universality of human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and “reaffirm the principle of non-discrimination which requires that human rights apply equally to every human being regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

The statement, a non-binding resolution that was not voted on, also called on nations to “condemn the human rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity wherever they occur, in particular the use of the death penalty on this ground, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the practice of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary arrest or detention and deprivation of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to health.”

The statement was presented this month in observance of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the U.N. any nation can present a statement; declarations must be voted on.

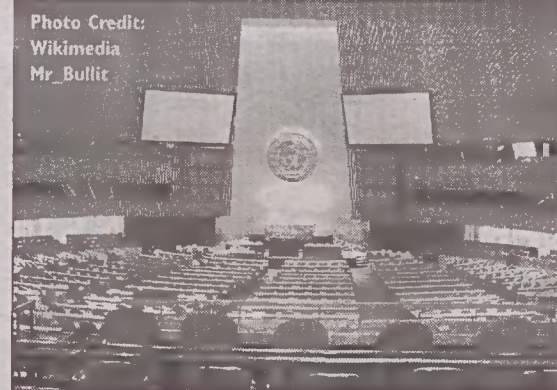
The U.S. was among several high profile nations refusing to sign the statement. According to The AP, some of the statement’s supporters said U.S. officials were concerned the statement’s language “might be problematic in committing the federal government on matters that fall under state jurisdiction.” Several U.S. states have yet to prohibit discrimination in housing or employment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender-identity. On a federal level, LGBT people are still prohibited

from serving openly in the military.

Although a coalition of Islamic nations that had campaigned heavily against the statement eventually ceded decision-making to individual member states, no Islamic country signed on.

The Vatican had come under fire for saying the statement would call into question the “value” of heterosexual relationships.

According to Bloomberg News, a coalition of 58 nations, led by Syrian envoy Abdullah al-Hallaq, presented an opposing statement warning that LGBT equality could “usher into



social normalization and possibly legitimization, of many deplorable acts, including pedophilia.”

Envoy al-Hallaq said the statement and any other means of protecting LGBT people would infringe on U.N. Charter guarantees of sovereignty for individual member states.

Several LGBT organizations had called on the U.S. to support the statement.

“It’s an appalling stance — to not join with other countries that are standing up and calling for decriminalization of homosexuality,” Paula Ettlbrick, executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, told The AP.

French human rights minister Rama Yade told The AP she thought the U.S. position was “disappointing,” given the nation’s record as a champion for human rights.

Homosexuality is still illegal in about 70 nations worldwide. In Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan and Yemen, Islamic law condemns those committing homosexuality to death, according to human rights blogger Mike Tidmus.

Sixty-six of the U.N.’s 192 member states supported the mid-December statement. ▀

online extra: Read the full U.N. statement and see a list of supporting U.N. member states at q-notes.com/un-statement/.

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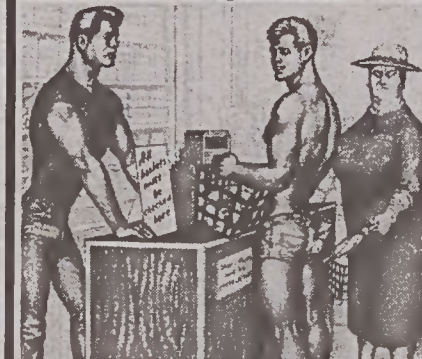
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