

USA: Trump administration looks to redefine 'human rights'

The commission will be chaired by a former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican

By Eric Tucker

The Mercury News (08.07.2019) – <https://bayareane.ws/2LFUzpz> – The Trump administration said Monday that it will review the role of human rights in American foreign policy, appointing a commission expected to elevate concerns about religious freedom and abortion.

Human rights groups accused the administration of politicizing foreign policy in a way that could undermine protections for marginalized populations, including the gay, lesbian and transgender community. Democratic senators have raised concerns about the panel's intent and composition, fearing it would consist of members who "hold views hostile to women's rights" and blow away existing human rights treaties.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the creation of the Commission on Unalienable Rights, saying the country must be "vigilant that human rights discourse not be corrupted or hijacked or used for dubious or malignant purposes."

As human rights claims have “proliferated,” he said, nations have grown confused about what constitutes a human right and which rights should be respected and treated as valid.

“I hope that the commission will revisit the most basic of questions: What does it mean to say, or claim, that something is in fact a human right?” Pompeo said. “How do we know, or how do we determine that this – or that – is a human right. Is it true, and therefore ought it to be honored?”

He said he expected the most comprehensive review on the subject since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations and laid out global rights and freedoms.

The commission will be chaired by Harvard Law School professor Mary Ann Glendon, a former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. A conservative scholar and author, Glendon turned down an honor from Notre Dame the year President Barack Obama was scheduled to deliver a commencement address over his support for abortion rights.

Amnesty International USA said there was no reason for such a review given the decades-old protections in place.

“This administration has actively worked to deny and take away long-standing human rights protections since Trump’s inauguration,” Joanne Lin, the group’s national director of advocacy and government affairs, said in a statement.

“If this administration truly wanted to support people’s rights, it would use the global framework that’s already in place. Instead, it wants to undermine rights for individuals, as well as the responsibilities of governments.

A group of Democratic senators said in a letter last month that they were dismayed that the commission was being assembled without congressional oversight. Several of the names of people reported to be on it, they charged, support discriminatory policies against gays and lesbians, “hold views hostile to women’s rights, and/or to support positions at odds with U.S. treaty obligations.”

“We believe the extent to which this administration has undermined American leadership and credibility on promoting fundamental human rights is of historic proportions,” the senators wrote. “The department’s proposed Commission on Unalienable Rights must not serve as a platform to further erode U.S. leadership and undercut U.S. interests.”

Glendon, who joined Pompeo at the State Department for the announcement, said she was honored to do the job at a time when “basic human rights are being misunderstood by many, manipulated by many and ignored by the world’s worst human rights violators.”