

February 8, 2023

Mr. Victor Madrigal-Borloz
UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Via email: ohchr-ie-sogi@un.org

Dear Mr. Madrigal-Borloz:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a leading US civil and human rights organization, I write to provide the below responses to your recent call for input regarding religious freedom and sexual orientation/gender identity.

SPLC was founded in 1971. Since that time, SPLC's mission has been to stamp out hate and extremism and to ensure that the rights of all persons are equally protected. Our work includes litigation and policy advocacy to advance the rights, dignity and freedom of the LGBTQ community in the Southern United States.

We write to express our grave concerns regarding the "[International Religious Freedom Summit](#)" (IRF), which took place in Washington DC last week (January 31 to February 1, 2023). While we have no quarrel in concept with an event that brings people from different political and ideological perspectives together to debate and promote religious freedom, we are alarmed that the IRF prominently featured speakers and sponsors the SPLC has identified as espousing and promoting extremist ideologies, especially anti-LGBTQ hate.

Former Kansas Governor Sam Brownback, who former President Trump appointed Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, is a co-chair of the event.

While Governor, Brownback issued an executive order allowing Kansas religious groups and political subdivisions to legally discriminate against LGBTQ people. He also co-authored an op-ed with [Tony Perkins](#), leader of anti-LGBTQ hate group [Family Research Council](#), that claimed Western culture is "increasingly hostile to foundational Christian beliefs about marriage, sexuality, and ethical behavior." Perkins, who is scheduled to speak at the Summit, claims that pedophilia is "a homosexual problem," and that the gay community is "intolerant, they're hateful, vile, they're spiteful." Perkins equates marriage equality with "the loss of religious freedom." His organization, the Family Research Council, espouses the same views in its publications.

Co-chair Brownback has also had close associations with other individuals the SPLC has identified as anti-LGBTQ extremists. For example, [David Barton](#), who has served as an advisor to Brownback, espouses anti-LGBTQ hate speech on his right-wing radio program. Barton has stated that gay people die decades earlier than others and have hundreds of sexual partners. He falsely told his listeners that the “leading pediatric association” in the US had advised against providing education about homosexuality, when in fact the group he cited was a splinter group with only a few hundred members. But according to Brownback, Barton “provides the philosophical underpinning for a lot of the Republican effort in the country today.”

Another anti-LGBTQ hate group, [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), is identified on the event website as a partner organization. It has supported the re-criminalization of sexual acts between consenting LGBTQ adults and defended state-sanction sterilization of trans people. It has also worked to develop so-called religious freedom legislation and court decisions that allow discrimination against LGBTQ people in public accommodations.

Research conducted by the SPLC has shown that once fringe extremist ideologies are becoming increasingly accepted in mainstream conservative politics. Given that the IRF featured anti-LGBTQ extremist speakers and sponsors alongside participants such as Samantha Power, head of USAID and David Beasley, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme have grave concerns that the event is has been used to further the mainstream platforming of the purveyors of LGTBQ hate disguised as religious freedom. These hate groups have already found success in exporting their ideologies to global right-wing groups, and their prominent presence at this event may lend them an even greater air of legitimacy in mainstream politics.

I hope that this submission will prove useful to you as you prepare your report. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if there is any further information we can provide.

With best regards,



LISA W. BORDEN
Senior Policy Counsel, International Advocacy