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July 21, 2015

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear High Commissioner Ra'ad Al Hussein:

We at the Secular Policy Institute, together with the below member organizations, call on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to set a global standard of gender-neutral marriage laws, and a ten-year goal for global implementation of them. Though gender-neutral marriage laws are most closely associated with shifting social and civil attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples, they also offer a locus where multiple human rights commitments intersect. A commitment to gender-neutral marriage laws allows us to promote deserved liberties, make our conceptions of humanity conform to what has been learned in the physical and social sciences, and to prepare us for future challenges that our current concept of marriage leave us ill-equipped to handle.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights state that the family is the “natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” In accordance, the right to found a family should be available to any persons of legal age. All people should be equal under the law and these rights be equally available to men and women—not exclusively between them; in essence marriage eligibility that is gender-neutral should be the universal standard.

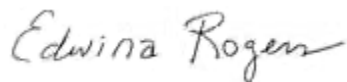
The first fifteen years of our current millennium have witnessed the introduction of gender-neutral marriage laws by the Netherlands, and an expansion of them to more than twenty (20) other countries. In the last month alone we have seen “marriage-equality” recognized by the Supreme Courts of the United States and Mexico, and for the first time a national referendum opening civil marriage eligibility to same-sex couples (in Ireland, with 60% supporting). But working against this trend are rapidly rising forces to prohibit same-sex marriage or even to criminalize homosexual behavior. Eighty (80) states currently criminalize homosexual behavior with punishments that can include death.

Current opposite-gender specific marriage laws fail to take into account that sexual orientation and gender identity are neither static nor dichotomous concepts. They are fluid and shifting, and

change across time and culture. In addition, the human population is not exclusively male or female. At least one percent of human beings are biologically inter-sexed. Gender-neutral marriage laws fit with contemporary and future realities about gender as a culturally contingent and flexible concept, not as a dichotomous one.

Secular Policy Institute is calling upon the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights to set as a global standard gender-neutral marriage laws. The United Nations Human Rights Council's mission is to promote and protect human rights and the support of gender-neutral marriage rights supports that objective. We call on the OHCHR to place this matter upon the agenda and to aid in sculpting a new global framework of gender-neutral marriage laws.

Sincerely,



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### **Signatory Groups**

- Argentine Sociedad Humanista Etica – Mendoza, Argentina
- Atheist Alliance International – Washington, DC, USA
- Atheist Community of Rochester, NY – Rochester, NY, USA
- Atheist Foundation of Australia – New South Wales, Australia
- The Freethought Society – Pennsylvania, USA
- Hispanic American Freethinkers, Inc. – Reston, VA, USA
- Humanist Association of Toronto – Toronto, Canada
- Humanist Chaplaincy at American University – Washington, DC, USA
- Humanist Society of Redding – Redding, CA, USA
- Humanists of North Central Florida – Florida, USA
- Humanists of Sarasota Bay, Inc. – Sarasota, FL, USA
- Humanists of the Treasure Coast – Florida, USA
- Italian Centro Per La Libera Ricerca – Italy
- Mid-West Humanists – Limerick, Clare, and Tipperary, Ireland
- Muslimish – Plymouth, MI, USA
- Northern Ohio Freethought Society – Cleveland, OH, USA
- OMAHA (Omaha Metro Area Humanist Association) – Omaha, NE, USA
- Ontario Humanist Society – Ontario, Canada
- Pink Triangle Trust – Kenilworth, UK
- The Romanian Humanist-Secularist Association – Bucharest, Romania
- Sidmennt – The Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association – Reykjavík, Iceland
- UnitedCoR – Washington, DC, USA
- The Universal Church Triumphant of the Apathetic Agnostic - USA