

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2020

The Honorable John Barsa
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Administrator Barsa:

We write to protest the comments by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) political appointee Merritt Corrigan, and request that you demand her resignation from her position as deputy White House Liaison. Her record of public remarks, including disparaging LGBTQ people and those who express support for them, women in positions of leadership, and immigrants, is appalling, and has no place in a federal agency.

Previous comments by Ms. Corrigan refer to a “homo empire” and condemn those who support “the gay agenda”. By contrast, USAID’s own LGBTQ resources state that “USAID promotes a nondiscriminatory and inclusive approach to development”¹. The agency’s Vision for Action is aimed at “promoting and supporting the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals”, advocating “for the equal treatment for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.”² We are left wondering how Ms. Corrigan is able to effectively serve an agency whose principles are so clearly antithetical to her own.

Ms. Corrigan has also stated her desire to “restore the patriarchy”, arguing against the “false pretense of [women’s] equality with men.” By contrast, USAID has an entire office devoted to gender equality and women’s empowerment, and the administration has made women’s economic empowerment a cornerstone of its international development agenda. USAID’s Global Health Bureau supports voluntary family planning, including contraception. However, Ms. Corrigan derides birth control as an “evil tool”, rather than praise the vital health, social, and economic support it provides to millions of women and their families around the world through USG-supported family planning.³ Based on these statements, so hostile to the core mission of the agency, it is clear that Ms. Corrigan cannot effectively liaise with the White House and meet USAID’s staffing needs.

¹ “Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance: LGBTI Inclusion.”

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/drg-lgbti-inclusion.pdf>

² “LGBT Vision for Action.” https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1874/LGBT_Vision.pdf

³ <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/FP-overview-6-12-19.pdf>

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Rather than acknowledge that the United States is a nation of immigrants and has grown as a nation thanks to the work, talent, engagement, and support of those who come to our country from around the world, Ms. Corrigan chose to denigrate immigration as “the hostile governing elite's preferred agent of chaos”. While USAID does not assist with immigration, many USAID beneficiaries later immigrate to the United States. USAID, in fact, employs many of them, valuing their expertise and skills—knowing that the Agency is richer and better at fulfilling its mission with their help. Again, Ms. Corrigan’s stated positions are in direct opposition to the work USAID supports.

We are also aware that USAID employees have concerns about Ms. Corrigan’s statements and have requested to speak with you on this matter.⁴ It is incumbent upon you, as the acting head of the agency, to hear and address these concerns. USAID has a legal obligation and moral imperative⁵ to provide its employees a workplace free of discrimination and harassment. USAID’s Standards of Conduct state the Agency strives to foster a “respectful, diverse, inclusive, and collaborative environment that promotes professional and personal growth for everyone,” and require employees to “promote and support a respectful and inclusive work environment in which all individuals are treated with dignity at all times. Employees shall ensure that both their verbal and non-verbal communications comport with this standard.” These are the same rights that USAID aims to achieve in its work on behalf of the American people overseas. We must hold our own employees to the same standards we seek to support in our development assistance.

The statements made by Ms. Corrigan create a hostile work environment and are antithetical to the principles the agency, and indeed America, espouses. To date, there has been no public retraction of these comments from Ms. Corrigan, or demand by USAID, or the White House that she retract them, but rather a statement defending Ms. Corrigan as “committed to enacting the policies of President Donald J. Trump.”⁶ For the sake of USAID’s employees, the beneficiaries it supports around the world, and the core values of the agency, we urge you to immediately condemn this speech, and demand Ms. Corrigan’s resignation.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

⁴ <https://www.axios.com/usaaid-barsa-corrigan-trump-mcentee-appointments-fd948ffa-8bad-41c3-9358-e86b8d374107.html>

⁵ USAID ADS Chapter 110 Equal Employment Opportunity, Policy Statement on Equal Opportunity, Harassment, and Retaliation. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/110.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jun-8-2020-statement-acting-administrator>

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Sincerely,

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