

UN widens its same-sex marriage policy to include all legally-married staff

8 July 2014 – The United Nations is changing how it categorizes staff personal status, allowing more same-sex couples access to the same benefits enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts.

According to a major policy change, in effect since 26 June, the UN will honour the marriage of any same-sex couple wed in a country where same-sex marriages are legal. Previously, a staff member's personal status was determined by the laws of the country whose passport he or she carried.

“Human rights are at the core of the mission of the United Nations,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said yesterday through a spokesperson. He added that he is “proud to stand for greater equality for all staff,” and called “on all members of the UN family to unite in rejecting homophobia.”

Mr. Ban did not consult UN Member States about the policy change.

“The Secretary-General acted on his own authority as the head of the management of the United Nations. This was a managerial decision affecting UN staff,” said the spokesperson.

The UN chief has been an outspoken supporter of decriminalizing consensual same-sex relationships, and tackling violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

“Human rights are for everyone, no matter who you are or whom you love,” he said in an opinion piece in May on LinkedIn. “As Secretary-General of the UN, I believe in and strive to achieve the world promised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a world rooted in tolerance, freedom and equality.”

Same-sex relationships are considered illegal in 76 countries. Meanwhile, same-sex marriages are legal in at least 16 countries with sub-national jurisdictions in at least two others, including the United States. The state of New York, where the UN is headquartered, recognizes same-sex marriage.

“Yet changes in law alone are not enough; they need to be matched by efforts to change social attitudes,” Mr. Ban noted in his op-ed.

“Equality begins at home, and I am all too aware that LGBT colleagues at the UN, and their families, continue to face challenges,” he said. “All staff members are part of the UN family and deserve to be treated equally.”