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NEW REPORT REBUKES AMERICAN POLICY ON GAY SOLDIERS:

Citing Research, Human Rights Group Calls on Congress and White House to End Federal Discrimination

SANTA BARBARA, CA, January 24, 2003 - Human Rights Watch (HRW), the largest human rights organization based in the United States, issued an exhaustive report this week condemning the U.S. military's ban on openly gay soldiers and calling on Congress to repeal the law. The report cites research confirming that known gays currently serve in both foreign and American military units without impairing combat performance. It further suggests that the current policy on gay soldiers is "counter-productive" and "antithetical to military objectives" because it wastes valuable talent and creates a hostile climate in which gays and lesbians must work.

In its report, HRW faults the U.S. for rhetorically championing democracy while maintaining laws that deny equal treatment to its own citizens. "The United States may wage war against those who disavow human rights," reads the report, "but it remains adamant against recognizing the fundamental rights of the gay men and lesbians who volunteer to fight, and die, for their country."

Citing research conducted by government and private organizations including the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM), a think tank at the University of California, Santa Barbara, HRW describes the "utter lack of empirical evidence" to support the need for a ban on known gay soldiers, pointing out that twenty four nations now allow gays to serve openly in their militaries. Beginning in 2000, CSSMM reviewed government and military documents and interviewed enlisted personnel and military leaders to assess the impact of lifting the ban in Canada, Israel, Australia and Britain. Researchers found no serious disruptions and no impairment of unit cohesion or military readiness in any of the foreign militaries it studied.

Dr. Aaron Belkin, Director of CSSMM, said the HRW report corroborated evidence that the military's gay ban is not required by military necessity and appears to undermine military readiness. "The extensive research that has been conducted on gay and lesbian service clearly indicates that our national security is not threatened by the presence of gay soldiers but by inflexible ideologies both abroad and right here at home," Belkin said.



The HRW report is available online at www.hrw.org.

The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Council on Foreign Relations, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces.