

JESSICA STERN

b. 1977

LGBTQ+ DIPLOMAT

“All human beings should be treated with respect and dignity and should be able to live without fear, regardless of who they love.”

Jessica Stern is a distinguished American diplomat and lifelong LGBTQ+ rights advocate. A senior fellow at Harvard since 2025, she previously served for four years in the Biden administration as the U.S. special envoy to advance the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

Raised Jewish in Setauket, New York, Stern credits her religious heritage with inspiring her pursuit of activism. After earning a master's degree in human rights from the London School of Economics, she began her career as a community organizer in Philadelphia and at the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York. She went on to work for Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as a researcher and an advocate.

**She is a distinguished
official U.S. advocate
for international
LGBTQ+ rights.**

In 2009, Stern joined Outright International (then the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) as director of programs. She was promoted to executive director in 2012. Among her many accomplishments, Stern quintupled the budget and built the world's largest COVID LGBTQ+ grant-making program. She helped secure UN observer

status and served as an early member of the United Nations LGBTI Core Group and a founding member of the UN Women LGBTI Reference Group.

Appointed U.S. special envoy for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons in 2021, Stern is the second person to hold the position since its creation in 2015. The role was not filled during President Trump's first term and is vacant in his second. In that State Department post, Stern worked with international partners to protect LGBTQI+ individuals from discrimination and violence worldwide and to promote the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in multilateral human rights frameworks.

In 2025, Stern was appointed the first senior fellow focused on LGBTQI+ rights at Harvard's Kennedy School Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights. She also serves as an adjunct professor of international public affairs at Columbia University, teaching the first and only LGBTQ+ rights course, and is the cofounder and co-president of the Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice, a group of senior officials and diplomats focused on human rights in U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy.

Stern has received honors from governments and institutions worldwide, including the U.S. Department of State. Her writing is regularly published in leading academic and political journals and has been cited in landmark human rights decisions.

Stern and her partner, Lisa Davis, live in Brooklyn, New York.



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