

Minister condemns plans for Uganda's first LGBT centre as 'criminal act'

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Campaigners are warned they will break the anti-homosexuality law if they open safe space

Activists trying to open Uganda's first centre for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have been told their plans for a safe space are illegal.

Simon Lokodo, minister for ethics and integrity, said opening the community centre would be a criminal act.

"They will have to take it somewhere else. They can't open a centre of LGBT activity here. Homosexuality is not allowed and completely unacceptable in [Uganda](#)," he said. "We don't and can't allow it. LGBT activities are already banned and criminalised in this country. So popularising it is only committing a crime."

But fundraising is continuing, according to campaigners crowdfunding to build and open an advice and arts centre in the capital, Kampala, by the end of the year.

"Queer people live in fear of being arrested or getting beaten up or killed. There is no safe space. This is why my team want to open Uganda's first LGBT community centre," said Petter Wallenberg, director of the group [Rainbow Riots](#).

"The centre will be a safe space to welcome queer people, encourage and support them. To achieve this, we are currently raising funds to cover the costs.

"We will provide opportunities to learn, relax, socialise and will also give advice on health and safety, which is much needed. It will in essence be a support system."

Alicia Houston, 22, a campaigner and HIV-positive transgender woman in Kampala, said a space was needed for a "vulnerable community" that is regularly confronted with violence and discrimination. "It will also be a creative space that will cater for many who don't have other chances to express themselves elsewhere," she said.

Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda under colonial laws. In 2014, an attempt to make some homosexual acts punishable by death was narrowly avoided when it was [ruled unconstitutional](#).

Neela Ghoshal, of Human Rights Watch, said such a centre was crucial.

"But, in what has become a familiar pattern, minister Lokodo is far overstepping his mandate by trying to block the proposed centre, in blatant violation of the right to freedom of association," she said.

Activists believe the arts can help to address transphobia and homophobia in the east African nation.

Kowa Tigs, a member of Rainbow Riots, said: “In Uganda anyone can humiliate you, embarrass you, chase you from his house, school or even home and you know there is nothing you can do about it. There is resentment and hatred towards LGBTI people and they are seen as evil and un-African.

“We have had team members drop out because they are scared of being exposed. But if we don’t speak out, then who will? Someone has to take a front seat.”

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