

Homophobic hate in Uganda

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In 2014, Ugandan MPs passed a law punishing homosexuality with penalties up to the death penalty. It was censured by the country's Supreme Court. Ugandan MPs have now done it again. Solidarity with the LGBTI community is needed!

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What has mobilized parliamentary activity in Uganda is not the rampant inflation or massive youth unemployment, nor the deplorable state of schools, hospitals and health clinics, human rights abuses or the ravages of the consequences of global warming in the countryside, but homosexuality which is said to be a terrible danger for the country.

One of the worst LGBTIphobic laws in Africa

In the midst of this homophobic turmoil, there has been a race to the bottom in terms of repression. The initial draft provided for a ten-year prison sentence for same-sex sexual relations. After the debates, the parliament tightened things up considerably. Of the 529 MPs in the House, 389 were present and only two voted against. This means that more than a hundred parliamentarians chose to stay away from the debate by choosing the empty chair policy. On the opposition side, the National Unity Platform welcomed the law.

The law adopted provides for life imprisonment or the death penalty in certain cases. It also obliges anyone, including family and friends, to report any gay or lesbian person they know to the authorities and prohibits renting to same-sex couples.

Homosexuals are no longer the only ones in the crosshairs as those who “promot” homosexuality are potentially guilty. This is a vague notion that allows for the repression of human rights activists who defend homosexuals. SMUG (Sexual Minorities Uganda), an anti-discrimination organisation, was already banned in August 2022.

Anti-gay rants

Obviously, homophobic policies in Africa are dressed up in an anti-colonialist discourse. Homosexuality is said to have been introduced by the colonists and the decadent West. This discourse denies the reality that homosexual practices existed long before colonisation. The terms referring to it are found in many African languages such as Kirundi, Kiswahili, Hausa, Herero, Xhosa, Bafia or Wawihé.

In fact, in most African countries, the repressive legislative arsenal against homosexuality dates back to the colonial period.

African homophobes who take offence at the solidarity of anti-discrimination activists in Western countries should put their own house in order. As Fox Odoi-Oywelowo, one of the two MPs who courageously fought this law, said, "Last year I was told that these Pentecostal communities spent over \$26 million in East Africa to - again - promote this anti-homosexuality law." One of their actions is to organize Prayer Breakfasts across the country every Saturday, to distil the hatred of homosexuals, which is widely echoed by the country's Muslim community leaders.

The solidarity imperative

The promulgation of this law depends on the signature of President Yoweri Museveni. In 2014 he had already initialled a similar law and his homophobic comments leave no doubt about his intentions unless there is strong international pressure. Indeed, the approval of this measure could lead to a significant loss of Western aid to the country. The European Union and the USA have expressed their deep disagreement with a law that does not respect the African Union's declaration that "every individual has the duty to respect and consider his fellow human beings without discrimination".

Solidarity mobilizations must be extended, in conjunction with gay rights organizations both in Uganda and across the continent. We must demand that France, like the European Union, commit to systematically offering refugee status to all people persecuted because of their sexual orientation.

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P.S.

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