

Anti-Homosexuality Bill signed by president of Uganda

BY VALERIA SOSA
STAFF WRITER

On Oct. 13, 2009, David Bahati, a member of the Parliament of Uganda, introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill.

On Dec. 17, 2013, the bill was passed in Parliament.

On Feb. 24, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni signed the bill into law.

Despite criticism from President Obama and former President Bill Clinton and warnings that signing the bill would complicate relations between Uganda and the U.S., Museveni refused to budge.

"We have been disappointed for a long time by the conduct of the West," Museveni told CNN. "Our disappointment is now exacerbated because we are sorry to see that you live the way you live, but we keep quiet about it. Now you say, 'you must also live like us.' That's where we say 'no.'"

Simon Lokodo, Uganda's ethics and integrity minister, also deemed Western criticism to be intrusive.

"Will they be comfortable if we come to America and started practicing polygamy?" Lokodo asked CNN. "Homosexuality is strange to us, and polygamy is strange to you. We have divergent views. When they call me wrong, I will call them wrong."

In Uganda, homosexuality first became punishable by law in the 19th century under British rule and has since remained a criminal offense and a taboo subject.

When the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was

passed by Parliament, however, many spoke up.

Seventy-seven clinicians, researchers and academics from 17 different countries and 14 organizations signed an open letter addressed to Museveni, debunking myths about homosexuality and predicting detrimental impacts of the bill on public health and human rights.

Coleen Cunningham, Chief of Pediatric Global Health at Duke University Medical Center, was one of 77 to sign the letter.

"There are many health implications (of passing the bill)," Cunningham told The Guilfordian. "MSM (men who have sex with other men) throughout the world have dramatically increased risk of becoming HIV-infected and would benefit from education to prevent HIV ... and enhanced diagnosis and early treatment efforts."

"However, if men are afraid to tell their medical providers that they are gay, then the provider is not able to target the optimal care to the high-risk individual."

According to UNICEF, in 2011, 7.2 percent of Ugandan adults had HIV. With the passage of the anti-gay bill, fear of

arrest, violence and discrimination will lead to medical care being less available to these men, according to the open letter.

The health implications of the anti-gay bill, however, transcend HIV treatment.

"LGBT will likely (have less access to) medical care altogether for fear of being identified as LGBT, and providers may be forced to stop providing medical services to people who identify as LGBT, as the providers can also be arrested under the new law," said Cunningham.

Ugandan culture presents a history of violence and discrimination against the LGBTQA community.

In 2012, "Call Me Kuchu," an American documentary, examined the struggles of the LGBTQA community in Uganda. The film focused in part on the murder of David Kato, a prominent LGBTQA rights advocate.

Kato's death followed the publishing of his name and address along with the names and addresses of 99 other "alleged homosexuals" in Rolling Stone, a Ugandan weekly tabloid.

"Hang them," said the tabloid's cover.

After winning a lawsuit against the tabloid, Kato was murdered in broad

daylight in 2011.

Giles Muhame, managing editor of Rolling Stone, showed no remorse for publishing the names after Kato's death.

"I haven't seen the court's injunction, but the war against the gays will and must continue," Muhame told Reuters. "We have to protect our children from this dirty homosexual affront."

Following Kato's death three years ago, Kato's friend Dr. Paul Semugoma, also a prominent LGBTQA rights activist, moved to South Africa with his partner in fear of violence and persecution.

On Feb. 18, the Department of Home Affairs arrested Semugoma upon his arrival to South Africa from a trip to Zimbabwe, claiming that his visa had expired. According to Lavinia Browne, liaison for the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation, Semugoma was being held in custody without being served meals or given clean clothing.

Semugoma resisted deportation to Uganda for fear of being persecuted upon his return. According to gay activists in Uganda, Semugoma is on a wanted list in Uganda for his LGBTQA activism.

On Feb. 20, the South African government agreed to grant Semugoma a four-year exceptional skills work permit in return for Semugoma dropping his claim for political asylum.

The danger of being LGBTQA in Uganda is high. The price of fighting against that danger? Even higher.

"We have to protect our children from this dirty homosexual affront."

Giles Muhame, managing editor of the Ugandan tabloid Rolling Stone

Venezuelan government cracks down on protests

BY MAILE MUNRO
STAFF WRITER

Protests across Venezuela turned violent last week, resulting in at least 13 protestors dead and hundreds more injured.

Youth-led protests began peacefully in reaction to soaring crime rates and a debilitating inflation rate of 56 percent, currently the highest in the world.

Essentials such as milk and sugar are scarce, and the black market is thriving as the government has cracked down on foreign exchange policies in an effort to restore the bolívar fuerte, Venezuela's currency, to original value.

"If you have a society that has no institutional channels

to raise its complaints, make demands and form policy, the tradition in Venezuela and in Latin America — and I think throughout the world — is to take to the streets," said Margarita López Maya, a historian in Caracas, Venezuela, who studies protest movements, to The New York Times.

As the nonviolent protests gained momentum and evolved into rowdy riots, the government took measures to strengthen its grip on the country. Over 500 protestors have been arrested, and Venezuelan military forces are now taking to the streets in hopes of reining in the protests.

Along with the physical violence playing out in cities across Venezuela, the government has stifled the majority of independent media outlets.

"It's a huge detriment and almost an insult to the citizens

of Venezuela, especially to the students who are protesting," said sophomore Venezuelan Victoria Saraldi, whose father lives in Caracas. "Their basic rights to freedom of speech and freedom of expression have been pretty much abolished by the current 'government.'"

Venezuela's constitution expressly prohibits any form of censorship that would restrict a citizen's freedom of expression. Yet, Freedom House reports that the Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media Law of 2004 gives the government rights to ban any content that "incites or promotes hatred, disrespects authorities, encourages assassination or constitutes war propaganda."

The Venezuelan reporters' trade union reported that, as of Feb. 17, 11 journalists were arrested while covering the protests. Other journalists had their cameras smashed and were beaten away from the action.

As television channels are shut down and newspapers are forced to stop printing due to paper shortages, activists have taken to a safer alternative: social media.

"Privacy is dead," said Robert Duncan, visiting assistant professor of political science. "Governments can no longer control information. The beauty of the digital age and electronics is that there are so many work-arounds, so many ways to penetrate the information."

While the Venezuelan government struggles to limit access to this information, it also blames the Obama administration for supporting anti-government sentiment throughout the nation, although U.S. officials have issued several press releases denying any involvement.

"I don't think we are actively involved," said Duncan, also a former CIA employee. "And if we are, it is in covert actions. It's secret, so (the public) wouldn't know of it anyway."

Venezuelan authorities demanded that three U.S. diplomats leave the country on Feb. 17 for campaigning on behalf of the protestors.

International speculation continues as these protests soldier on and people around the world show their support for activists in Venezuela through social media. Trending now: #SOSVenezuela and #PrayforVenezuela.



Maracaibo City is only one of the places in Venezuela where protests, especially those against the government, have become violent.