

Ugandan gov't campaign against gays escalates

Delusional president denies existence of LGBT community

by Scott Long

UGANDA — In a country where a sodomy conviction carries a penalty of life imprisonment, a Ugandan tabloid's decision to publish the names of alleged gay men is a chilling development that could presage an even larger government crackdown.

In early August, the Ugandan tabloid paper *Red Pepper* published a list of first names, workplaces and other identifying information of 45 alleged gay men. The paper claimed it was publishing the list "to show the nation ... how fast the terrible vice known as sodomy is eating up our society."

The paper has since told civil society activists that it plans to publish a similar list of alleged lesbians. "For years, President Yoweri Museveni's government routinely threatens and vilifies lesbians and gays, and subjects sexual-rights activists to harassment," said Jessica Stern, researcher in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Program of Human Rights Watch. "At a moment when sensational publicity has spread fear among a whole community, the authorities must exercise their responsibility to protect, not persecute."

Human Rights Watch is calling on Ugandan authorities to:

- End a long campaign of homophobic statements by top officials, including President Museveni;
- Cease arrests under the sodomy laws and promptly repeal them; and
- Offer protection against violence and harassment to human rights defenders working to protect lesbian and gay rights.

Homophobic allegations in *Red Pepper* have previously led to police action. In 2002, the tabloid ran banner headlines and photographs about an alleged wedding between two women. Kampala police promptly arrested the women in question. Although they were freed when an attorney intervened, they were jailed again and held for several days, allegedly for their own safety, after a mob threatened them. A Ugandan pastor who had counseled them was later forced to leave the country.

Same-sex sexual relations are criminalized in Uganda under a sodomy law inherited from British colonial rule. *Section 140* of the Penal Code criminalizes "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" *Section 141* punishes "attempts" at carnal knowledge with a maximum of seven years' imprisonment. *Section 143* punishes acts of "gross indecency" with up to five years in prison. In both Britain and Uganda, these terms were long understood to describe consensual homosexual conduct between men.

Background

For close to two years, Human Rights Watch said, officials have regularly threatened and harassed LGBT Ugandans. In October

2004, the country's information minister, James Nsaba Buturo, ordered police to investigate and "take appropriate action against" a gay association allegedly organized at Uganda's Makerere University.

State-owned media have repeatedly called for stronger measures against homosexual conduct. On July 6, 2005, a writer in the government-owned *New Vision* newspaper urged authorities to crack down on homosexuality, saying, "The police should visit the holes mentioned in the press, spy on the perverts, arrest and prosecute them. Relevant government departments must outlaw or restrict websites, magazines, newspapers and television channels promoting immorality — including homosexuality, lesbianism, pornography, etc."

Later that month, local government officers raided the home of Victor Mukasa, a lesbian activist and Chairperson of Sexual Minorities Uganda. They seized documents and other materials, and arrested another lesbian activist and held her overnight.

On Sept. 29, 2005, President Museveni signed into law a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. The amendment says that "marriage is lawful only if entered into between a man and a woman," and specifies that "it is unlawful for same-sex couples to marry." A parliamentary spokesperson said at the time that criminal penalties for engaging in such marriages would be imposed later.

The government has also silenced discussion of gay and lesbian rights and lives. The Broadcasting Council, a board of government censors, fined a radio station 1.8 million shillings (more than US \$1000) for hosting a lesbian and two gay men on a talk show, where they protested against discrimination and called for repeal of the sodomy laws. In February 2005, the Media Council — a state censorship board — banned a staging of the play, "The Vagina Monologues," by U.S. author Eve Ensler, because it "promotes illegal acts of unnatural sexual acts, homosexuality and prostitution."

Men named in the *Red Pepper* article have reportedly already been threatened and harassed. Ugandan activists point out that, in a deeply patriarchal society, accusations against alleged lesbians could subject them to violence in the family and community. U.N. statistics in 2000 showed that 41 percent of Ugandan women had suffered domestic violence.

A March 2005 Human Rights Watch report on "abstinence-until-marriage" HIV programs in Uganda found these programs were denying young people accurate information on HIV transmission and on sexual health. These programs also intrinsically discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. With a legal ban in place against gay or lesbian relationships, the programs promote only permanent abstinence and are uniformly silent about safer sexual practices. Promoting abstinence until heterosexual marriage is the continuation of an outright denial by the Ugandan government that LGBT people exist. In March 2002, while accepting an award for his country's HIV/AIDS prevention programs, President Museveni said simply, "We don't have homosexuals in Uganda." ▀



'We don't have homosexuals in Uganda.'

— President Yoweri Museveni

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Friday Sept 29

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www.Kodialsrfc.org - Pizza Party

9pm-till - Miller Lite presents

Pride Video Showtunes Night

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Saturday Sept 30

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country Dance Music

10:30pm-till - Stoli present

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