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Edward Mutebi
Let's Walk Uganda
Email: lwuganda@gmail.com
Tel: +254 73360 5646

Ugandan parliament votes against human rights

The Ugandan parliament passed a controversial "Anti-Homosexuality Bill" threatening fundamental human rights

Press Release

Kampala, Uganda: On Tuesday, March 21st, the Ugandan parliament passed the controversial "Anti-Homosexuality Bill". The involvement of the death penalty escalates human rights violations towards queer people in the East African country. According to various human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch the document would constitute one of the most hostile laws in the world discriminating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex people (LGBTQI+). The proposition of the bill which now only awaits the president of Uganda to sign it into force, has already triggered a steep increase in homophobic violence. Civil society organisations fear fatal repressions rising in the coming months.

Already narrowed space for the LGBTQI+ community in Uganda

The LGBTQI+ community in Uganda has already been under attack for years. According to documentations of the international human rights organisation Human Rights Watch many queer people have been attacked by mobs, driven out of places of accommodation or denied access to health services in the past months. Hatred has been fostered by religious institutions, foremost conservative anglican and evangelical churches sponsored largely from the United States of America. At the same time state institutions have increasingly contributed to a homophobic environment. A recent government report has recommended the closure of LGBTQI+ friendly organisations. Repression towards the LGBTQI+ community has culminated on Tuesday, 21rd of March in the passing of the "Anti-Homosexuality Bill" in the Ugandan parliament.

The "Anti-Homosexuality Bill"

In the parliamentary session on Tuesday, repressions so far proposed in the bill have been aggravated up to the death penalty. The passed "Anti-Homosexuality Bill" criminalises same sex relations, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex gender identities by imposing life imprisonment. The bill condemns persons living with HIV to suffer death upon conviction of homosexuality and likewise makes it punishable by death to have same sex relations with a person living with a disability or with a person of advanced age. The bill further criminalises being an ally to the LGBTQI+ community whether by providing medical care, housing, legal services, associating or making any queer friendly expression in the media. Such acts would be punishable up to 10 years in prison. Children who are involved in

homosexual acts are also penalised by the bill with up to three years of imprisonment. Media portrayals of homosexuality would be persecuted. In a global comparison, the bill thereby constitutes one of the most discriminating legal documents towards LGBTQI+ people.

While existing legislation is already criminalising homosexuality in Uganda, this bill symbolises a heavy reinforcement. Its gazetting has sparked homophobic media discourses and several acts of mob-violence within the past weeks according to the Ugandan Human Rights organisation "Let's Walk Uganda". They anticipate the passed bill to fuel discrimination and are worried about a steep increase in persecution and unprecedented displacements of people. While they hope that the bill be challenged in the Constitutional Court, already its passing carries life threatening danger to the Ugandan LGBTQI+ community. "Lessons from the temporary law making of the unconstitutional anti-homosexuality bill 2013 show that the passing of the bill, the LGBTQI+ community will face mass imprisonment, police violence and homelessness" fears Edward Mutebi, Ugandan queer rights activist. Documenting "almost daily public calls for genocide on the LGBTQI+ community" he claims "there is acute danger to the lives of many people". The bill is now being passed onto the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni for his signature. Without national and international protest, it is expected that it will turn into law during the coming weeks.

Voices:

"Each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. I join the concerns on the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill with its strategic timing of introduction and the crimes defined there under" says Dr. Lina Zedriga Waru, Secretary of Uganda's National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination, human rights activist and vice president of the oppositional party National Unity Platform.

"The passing of the bill is to be condemned as an essentially inhumane act. The international community needs to take concerted action so that the bill does not become into action. It must however equally prepare for the worst case: governments and civil society organisations must support community organisations in place and legal options for safe flight for people in acute danger" claims Edward Mutebi, LGBTQI+ rights activist, founder of the community organisation Let's Walk Uganda and founding member of the writers association PEN Berlin.

About Let's Walk Uganda

Let's Walk Uganda is an LGBTQI+ Human Rights Organisation in Kampala, Uganda. The organisation is known to have established the first safe housing shelter for homeless LGBTQI+ persons in Uganda. Together with other human rights organisations it has been advocating for basic rights for the LGBTQI+ community in Uganda.

Contact

Email: lwuganda@gmail.com
Website: www.lwuganda.org
Twitter: [@LWUGANDA](https://twitter.com/LWUGANDA)
Instagram: [@Let's Walk Uganda](https://www.instagram.com/Let's_Walk_Uganda)