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# Progressive cash for the anti-LGBTQI backlash?

How aid donors and 'feminist'  
governments have funded backers of  
Uganda's deadly Anti-Homosexuality Bill

Donor/development partners' responses  
to our findings

## **Canada (Global Affairs Canada)**

The project in question was led by the Africa Community Technical Service, and ran from 2014 to 2016. Its objective was to improve health and food security through improving access to potable water and training in health and agriculture. The Church of Uganda was one of eight local partners in the project.

The Government of Canada is deeply concerned by the anti-gay legislation that was approved by Uganda's parliament in March 2023. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Foreign Minister Melanie Joly both immediately and forcefully condemned the bill and urged Ugandan lawmakers to reconsider the legislation.

Canada is committed to promoting and protecting the human rights of 2SLGBTQI+ persons at home and around the world, as respect for human rights is at the heart of Canada's international policies and engagement, including the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) launched in 2021.

In 2019, the Government of Canada announced the LGBTQ2I+ International Assistance Program (the Program), which represents \$30 million in dedicated funding over five years, and \$10 million per year thereafter to advance human rights and improve socio-economic outcomes for LGBTQI+ people in developing countries.

## **Germany (BMZ)**

Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklung (EZE) has funded a project with Uganda Orthodox Mothers Union (UOMU), the women's organization of the Orthodox Church of Uganda, during the said period of 2018 - 2021. This is not an institutional funding of the Orthodox Church Uganda, but a project funding that explicitly aims to promote and empower disadvantaged people. Currently, a follow-up phase of the project is underway. The project focuses on strengthening the self-help capacities of disadvantaged people.

In addition, EZE is funding a project with the organization CHAPTER 4, which aims to support young lesbian, gay and transgender people. The project is the first for parents, friends and family of lesbian, gay and transgender children in Uganda. Parents get information and support and safe spaces to meet. The new allies are supposed to lobby for the rights of sexual minorities, publish articles and engage for their legal protection.

The BMZ is following developments in Uganda very closely and with great concern. We have been in close contact with people in Uganda who are affected by this legislation for a long time. We take their specific needs into account in our approach and reactions.

We will closely coordinate possible reactions in the donor group and in the EU. The Ugandan government is aware of our position. The situation of civil society and the impairment of social groups was and is the subject of our discussions with Ugandan government and parliamentary representatives.

The BMZ works closely with civil society in Uganda to strengthen the capacities and political participation of civil society organisations. The aim is to promote development based on the recognized principles of human rights, which benefits all social groups and does not exclude, leave anyone behind or criminalize them in an unjustified manner.

## **Austria (Foreign Ministry)**

We can confirm that as part of the Austrian Development Cooperation, Austria is contributing to the funding of clearly earmarked activities of the UNDP project “Strengthening Electoral Processes”. The funded activities include a radio programme to inform voters about the election, and the training of the Human Rights Commission as well as of judicial staff and security forces on how to conduct election support. The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda received neither direct nor indirect Austrian funds.

The Austrian position is clear: We are deeply concerned and appalled about the impact of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. As one of the first European states, we criticised this discriminatory and dehumanising legislation publicly on 22 March. In this regard, we also co-signed a letter in our capacity as member of the Equal Rights Coalition to President Museveni, urging not to sign this bill.

Austria is strongly committed to ensuring the full enjoyment of all human rights for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation. Legislation which criminalizes homosexuality and foresees long prison sentences and even the death penalty as a punishment, is not acceptable. The Anti-homosexuality Act, if signed, undermines the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Ugandans. We therefore urge the Ugandan Government once again to uphold the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution, stipulating equality and non-discrimination for all, its international obligations and commitments, and the principles of the African Charter. Such a law would be contradictory to many aspects we have focused on in our cooperation in the justice sector built on decades of a constructive relationship.

## **United States (USAID)**

It is a foreign policy priority of the Biden-Harris administration to promote and protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons globally, and USAID is proud to play a central and important role in helping support conditions around the world so that LGBTQI+ people are respected, live with dignity, and are free from violence, discrimination, stigmatization, and criminalization.

In line with this, USAID is committed to nondiscrimination for all program participants—including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity—and works to ensure that no one is discriminated against in USAID-funded programs. USAID regularly reviews and assesses the work of our partners to ensure they are operating in a manner that is consistent with our values and takes appropriate actions in response. We take these commitments seriously and are looking into the matter further.

## **Finland (Foreign Ministry)**

Thank you for your valuable email.

Finland considers the principle of non-discrimination as a cornerstone of human rights. All human beings are born equal and they must be guaranteed the same rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Finland advocates the elimination of all forms of criminalisation as well as other discriminatory legislation and official measures based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. We support every person’s right to define his/her gender and sexuality on his/her own terms. Finland supports the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersex people, or LGBTI persons, through economic and political means.

When acting on government grant organisations are independent actorst but have to comply with Finnish legislation. Organisations receiving development cooperation funds from the

Ministry for Foreign Affairs commit to applying and adhering to the Ethical Code of Conduct in its development cooperation activities. The current ethical Code of Conduct (enforced from 2022) can be found here:

<https://um.fi/documents/397000/0/General+conditions+for+the+use+of+discretionary+government+grants+awarded+by+the+Ministry+for+Foreign+Affairs+and+complementary+conditions+for+programme+support+together+with+the+ethical+code+of+condu+%281%29.pdf/48dadaa2-6f11-bef3-7dbb-ded240619bcf?t=1644934175021> but there has been an ethical code of conduct for long period of time.

In case an organisation fails to meet these conditions for the use of the grant awarded to it, the Ministry can set a date by which the conditions must be fulfilled, suspend the disbursement, or demand a repayment of paid instalments.

We encourage to report any suspicion of the misuse of development cooperation funds, such as bribery, embezzlement or other actions that are in conflict with the conditions applying to the use of the funding. All reports are handled either at our Ministry or referred to other public authorities. You can make a report here:

<https://um.fi/do-you-suspect-misuse-of-development-cooperation-funds->

- + *Then, it was [reported in Finnish media](#) on 27 April, quoting ministry officials, that as a result of our report “the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland is investigating support for a Pentecostal church whose representative has expressed anti-rainbow opinions”.*

## Ikea Foundation

Thanks for reaching out. The project you refer to is related to a grant for Oxfam in 2016 to strengthen the capacity of local and national humanitarian organizations in Uganda to lead emergency response. It was aimed at building local ability to respond to communities’ needs before, during and after crises through innovative funding and partnership models, such as cash and forecast-based financing.

This project ended in 2021 and is no longer active.

Our partner relationships are built on trust. In this case our grant was to Oxfam and we trusted Oxfam to identify the implementors, alliances and networks on the ground to achieve the project aims. The grant’s objective was to strengthen local capacity in the context of emergencies response. This particular project involved 60 local and national groups in Uganda that were sub contracted by Oxfam including Pentecostal Assemblies of God. As our funding cannot be used to promote or advance any religious beliefs, we have approached Oxfam to understand more about the nature of this collaboration.

We believe that organizations that are closer to the issues that we collectively seek to address are best suited to implement programs and conduct sub-contracting locally. In this case, we value Oxfam’s experience and expertise. At the same time, we have guardrails in place to prevent human rights violation in the context of the work we fund. Any abuse is **unacceptable and goes against the values we stand for**. All our partners undergo a rigorous due diligence process and contractually commit to respect human rights, comply with applicable laws, and respect the principles and standards laid down in the IKEA Foundation Ethical Framework. In addition, our partners have an obligation to report any violations of said principles and standards, including violations by implementing partners.

## UNFPA

This year UNFPA provided the IRCU with \$191,139 through the Spotlight Initiative, an initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, run by the UN and supported by the EU and others.

UNFPA has worked with the IRCU solely to promote SRHR; combat SGBV and FGM and we have not supported any of IRCU's activities relating to LGBTQI rights. UNFPA stands by the UN family in advocating on LGBTQI rights in Uganda. We believe all people should have full access to sexual and reproductive health, regardless of their sexual orientation, where they were born or any other characteristic. Here is Natalia Kanem's [statement](#) on the attempted criminalization of homosexuality.

Despite differing views, IRCU has been a long standing and strategic partner for UNFPA, on a number of core areas. They have worked towards ending child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. They have also been a strong advocate of offering sexual and reproductive health services for young people.

With UNFPA support, IRCU works in multiple areas, including:

- Mobilizing communities
- Strengthening capacity on community mobilization and advocacy for social norms change.
- Policy setting and strategic planning
- Joint advocacy at national and district level on SRHR activities

These activities have positively impacted the lives of thousands of women and girls in Uganda.

### *Follow-up comments:*

- *There are no plans for an additional allocation of funds to IRCU this year -the funding received in February this year is expected to be fully implemented by 30th April 2023 and no other disbursements are expected under Phase 1 of the Spotlight Initiative nor other funding sources.*
- *UNFPA remains deeply troubled by attempts to criminalize same-sex relationships. When we described UNFPA's "long-standing strategic partnership" with the IRCU we were referring to our collaboration with the IRCU since 2010, which has focused on the complex task of expanding sexual and reproductive health and rights programming to prevent GBV, child marriage, and end female genital mutilation and has had an immense positive impact on the lives of women and girls in Uganda, despite our organizations' differing views on LGBTQ+ issues. Moving forward, this partnership is being re-evaluated, but this does not negate the impact of it to date.*

## Norway (Foreign Ministry)

Norway is deeply worried about the situation for LGBT+ people in Uganda. We promote the rights of all LGBT+ people without discrimination, in law and practice. We stand firmly against the use of the death penalty in all circumstances.

Please find below additional information about the two projects you point to:

- The Inter Religious Council Uganda (IRCU): **Along with** other development partners, Norway provided support through UNDP to the programme "Support to Electoral Processes in Uganda Project (SEPU)" from 2020-2023. The main objective of the programme is to strengthen inclusive electoral processes in Uganda through partnerships. The IRCU was one of several stakeholders selected by UNDP to participate in the project, given the

challenging pre-election context in 2020. No funds have been transferred from UNDP to IRCU, but UNDP has covered costs related to i.a. rent of conference venues to facilitate peace training and dialogue meetings in 2020 and 2021. Due to delays in implementation the project will end August 2023. UNDP has been informed that no further payments with Norwegian funds should be made to cover activities carried out by, or including participation from IRCU.

- Pentecostal Churches of Uganda: The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Norad, has supported Pentecostal Churches of Uganda through the Norwegian organisation Digni and their partner organisation, the Norwegian Pentecostal Mission. The support during the period 2019-2023 amounts to NOK 2,7 million for the «Wezesha Project – capacity building in leadership and management». Norad's partners are required to have ethical guidelines in line with Norad's [Ethical guidelines – Guide for Norad's Grant Recipients](#). Furthermore, it's stated in the grant agreement that the partner shall continuously identify, assess and mitigate potential negative risks on human rights.

#### *Follow-up comments:*

- *Regarding “UNDP has been informed that no further payments with Norwegian funds should be made to cover activities carried out by, or including participation from IRCU.”*
  - *This happened on 24 April, as a result of your report.*
- *Partners of Norad's partners are also required to follow ethical guidelines that comply with Norad's guidelines for grants recipients.*
- *As part of our due diligence process, Norad undertakes an external partner assessment, as well as a thorough assessment of the partner's actual application for grants. We consult Norwegian embassies with regard to context related risk assessments and local partners part of the application.*
- *As to the Pentecostal Churches of Uganda, we are currently establishing a clearer picture of the facts. We are in dialogue with Digni to gain more information about the assessments they have made.*

#### **The Netherlands (Foreign Ministry)**

The Church of Uganda does not receive direct funding from the Netherlands, but does receive funding from a strategic partnership led by Mensen met een Missie. The Dutch support amounts to a total of 150,000 euros for the period of 2021-2025. The financial support is intended to strengthen interreligious dialogue and counter radicalisation. The evaluations showed no aid was used to restrict the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons.

Interreligious dialogue and countering radicalisation are important themes for the Netherlands. To achieve results in this field, our partners (in this case Mensen met een Missie) sometimes work with churches and other faith-based organisations, even if these organisations do not share all of our views. This collaboration offers the opportunity for critical dialogue, especially on themes such as equal rights for the LGBTIQ+ community. We are therefore in constant dialogue with our partners about the human rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. And to look for ways to contribute to de-escalation and countering violence, as well as discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people. Recently, we discussed this with Mensen met een Missie.

The Netherlands firmly stands for LGBTIQ+ rights. We support organisations that are committed to the rights of LGBTIQ+ in Uganda. We also speak out publicly and behind closed doors for rights of the LGBTIQ+ community in Uganda. We are doing the same, for example, regarding the proposed anti-gay legislation. These recent developments in Uganda are shocking.

The Church of Uganda also received funding from a strategic partnership led by the Interkerkelijk Coördinatie Commissie Ontwikkelingshulp. The Dutch financial support until 2020 consisted of 240,000 euros. This support was intended for food security and sustainable private sector development projects in Uganda.

All of our partnerships, including those mentioned above, have built-in checks to prevent programmes from contributing to hate speech, violence or discrimination. Those checks include: reporting obligations, project visits and reporting procedures. The results showed no aid was used to restrict the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons.

### **UK (FCDO), [told to VICE](#)**

Following a press release and public comments from the IRCU in February 2023 regarding the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023, the UK made the decision to discontinue this funding.

“All UK Aid partners are put through rigorous due diligence assessments before receiving any funding. The UK does not currently provide funding to the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda.”

### **Denmark (Foreign Ministry)**

Together with other Development partners, Denmark has through UNDP supported a project promoting inclusive election processes in Uganda from 2020-2023. IRCU was one of several relevant stakeholders selected by UNDP to participate in the project due to the assessment by UNDP that IRCU played a significant role in promoting a peaceful environment during the latest election.

Denmark also supported a programme promoting national dialogue from 2018-2019 in preparation for the elections in 2021. Religious groups, incl. IRCU, took part in order to ensure inclusion of diverse groups of Ugandan society in the dialogue.

Denmark will continue to focus on ensuring that Danish development funds contributes to promoting democratic values and upholding human rights. This includes protecting – and not antagonizing – the rights of LGBT+ people and other Danish priorities. Specifically, with regards to the ongoing election programme with UNDP, Denmark has requested that no Danish funds under the programme are used for funding IRCU activities going forward.

### **Sweden**

Sweden has also taken action following ICRU's clear and outspoken support of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. On 28 April the Embassy requested UNDP to ensure that no Swedish funds under the SEPU programme is disbursed to IRCU or activities involving IRCU. On the same day UNFPA was instructed to halt all further support to IRCU under the programme against Gender-Based Violence.

### **Iceland**

Together with a number of other development partners, Iceland has provided support through UNDP to the programme “Support to Electoral Processes in Uganda Project (SEPU)” from 2020-2023. The main objective of the programme was to strengthen inclusive electoral processes in Uganda through partnerships. IRCU was one of several relevant stakeholders selected by UNDP to participate in the project.