



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 25, 2014

Uganda Stiffens Penalties for Homosexuality

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni (shown) has signed into law a bill that stiffens penalties for those found guilty of homosexual acts. Homosexual behavior is already prohibited in the country, but under the new law, reported the [BBC](#), individuals may be imprisoned for life if convicted of “aggravated homosexuality,” and may also be punished for promoting homosexuality, encouraging others to identify as homosexual, or speaking positively about such issues as same-sex marriage.



Also, for the first time lesbians will be included in prohibitions against homosexual behavior in the country. [Time](#) magazine noted that earlier drafts of the bill had made it a crime “not to report gay people — in effect making it impossible to live as openly gay — but this clause has been removed.”

Museveni had initially laid aside the legislation, introduced last year, as he reportedly awaited counsel from U.S. researchers on the scientific evidence concerning the roots of homosexuality. But at a ceremony following the signing of the bill, Museveni said that “no study has shown you can be homosexual by nature. That’s why I have agreed to sign the bill.”

Additionally, according to a Ugandan government spokesman, Museveni ultimately signed the bill as a declaration of “Uganda’s independence in the face of Western pressure.”

That pressure came in the form of strong statements from both President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry. In a prepared statement Kerry warned that the new law “threatens a dangerous slide backward in Uganda’s commitment to protecting the human rights of its people and a serious threat to the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] community in Uganda.”

Similarly, the Obama administration reacted strongly to the news, calling the new law “abhorrent,” with White House press secretary Jay Carney declaring that “instead of standing on the side of freedom, justice, and equal rights for its people, today, regrettably, Ugandan President Museveni took Uganda a step backward by signing into law legislation criminalizing homosexuality.”

Carney added that “as President Obama has said, this law is more than an affront and a danger to the gay community in Uganda, it reflects poorly on the country’s commitment to protecting the human rights of its people and will undermine public health, including efforts to fight HIV/AIDS.”

Carney said that President Obama would “continue to urge the Ugandan government to repeal this abhorrent law and to advocate for the protection of the universal human rights of LGBT persons in Uganda and around the world.”

Britain’s Foreign Secretary William Hague registered his nation’s disappointment over the bill, saying he was “deeply saddened and disappointed that the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda has been signed into law.” He warned that the new measure may violate Uganda’s own constitution as well as its “international treaty obligations,” adding that it will doubtless “increase persecution and discrimination of Ugandans, as well as damage Uganda’s reputation internationally. We ask the government of Uganda



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to protect all its citizens and encourage tolerance, equality, and respect.”

But Museveni resisted the pressure applied by other nations, emphasizing that “outsiders cannot dictate to us” his country’s response to moral issues. “This is our country. I advise friends from the West not to make this an issue, because if they make it an issue the more they will lose. If the West does not want to work with us because of homosexuals, then we have enough space to ourselves here.”

Museveni noted that there are “myriad acts that societies in the West do that we frown on or even detest. We, however, never comment on those acts or make them preconditions for working with the West. Africans do not seek to impose their views on anybody. We do not want anybody to impose their views on us.”

The sponsor of the bill, Ugandan MP David Bahati, insisted that homosexuality is a “behavior that can be learned and can be unlearned,” adding that it “is just bad behavior that should not be allowed in our society.” Bahati said that because Uganda is a “God-fearing nation, we value life in a holistic way. It is because of those values that members of parliament passed this bill regardless of what the outside world thinks.”

The [Washington Post](#) reported that Uganda’s new law “comes six weeks after Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law a ban on homosexuality that imposes 14-year prison terms for anyone entering a same-sex union. It also sets 10-year prison sentences for those who run gay clubs or organizations.”

Photo of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni: AP Images



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