

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/06/10/uganda-drop-charges-against-sexual-rights-activists>

EXCERPT :

Uganda: Drop Charges Against Sexual Rights Activists

Censorship, Silence Around HIV/AIDS Can Kill

June 10, 2008

The arrest of three sexual rights activists during a peaceful demonstration to raise awareness about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues shows the Ugandan government's determination to enforce silence around sexuality and HIV/AIDS, Human Rights Watch said in a letter to Minister of Justice and Attorney General Edward Kiddy Makubuya.

Although the activists were released on June 6, Human Rights Watch urged the government to drop all charges against the three and to stop future arrests and prosecution of activists working on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

On June 3, 2008, police in Kampala detained Onziema Patience, Valentine Kalende, and Usaam Mukwaaya while demonstrating during the HIV/AIDS Implementers Meeting – a conference aimed at sharing lessons learned and best practices for HIV/AIDS programs. The three activists were protesting remarks made the day before by the chair of the Uganda AIDS Commission, Kihumuro Apuuli. He had declared that “gays are one of the drivers of HIV in Uganda,” and that the government could not afford direct prevention and care.

“Silence around HIV/AIDS kills,” said Juliana Cano Nieto, researcher of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Program at Human Rights Watch. “LGBT people do not ‘drive’ HIV in Uganda, but they have driven many community-based responses. They deserve recognition and inclusion, not repression and jail.”

The three activists face charges of “criminal trespass” under article 302 of the Uganda Criminal Code. Even though cosponsors of the Implementers Meeting later provided the activists with appropriate accreditation, the police detained one of the activists for over four hours and charged him with “forgery of documents.” All three face a court hearing on June 20, 2008.

Human Rights Watch has repeatedly drawn Ugandan authorities' attention to patterns of abuse based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In an [August 2007 letter](#), Human Rights Watch wrote to President Museveni concerning threatening statements made by government officials against LGBT people in Uganda. In an [October 2007 letter](#), Human Rights Watch expressed alarm over authorities' call to tighten enforcement of the country's draconian sodomy law, which punishes homosexual conduct with up to life imprisonment.

"When police silence voices defending public health, the only winner is the virus," said Cano Nieto. "Uganda's once-praised HIV prevention efforts are giving way to prejudice and fear."

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