

**The New York Times** Reprints

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit [www.nytreprints.com](http://www.nytreprints.com) for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)



May 2, 2010

# In Uganda, Push to Curb Gays Draws U.S. Guest

By JOSH KRON

KAMPALA, Uganda — As storm clouds brewed in the near distance, about 1,300 people gathered at the grassy Makerere University sports grounds here for a special Sunday afternoon rally and prayer service that, its organizers said, was to discuss homosexuality, witchcraft, corruption and the fear of violence leading up to the country's presidential election next year.

The guest of honor, Lou Engle, an American evangelical from Kansas City, bowed up and down from his knees at the front of the stage.

Mr. Engle, who helped found TheCall Ministries, a prayer group that focuses on moral issues, arrived last week in [Uganda](#), where TheCall has opened a new chapter. His trip comes amid a heated debate throughout the country over a bill that would ban advocacy of gay rights and suggests the death penalty for homosexuals who have AIDS and engage in sexual relations.

Homosexuality is already illegal in Uganda, as in several other poor African nations. Last fall, Uganda's Parliament began discussion of the sweeping bill, which has brought threats of aid cuts to Uganda, and has focused attention on several American pastors and politicians who have come here and offered themselves as experts on what they consider the scourge of homosexuality.

For much of Sunday's service, the topic of homosexuality was slipped in between mentions of corruption and witchcraft; evils that Ugandans were told they should wish away. Unlike at other rallies, gay activists did not picket or protest. Instead they roamed the grounds quietly, watching from a distance.

Though not originally linked to the Ugandan legislation, Mr. Engle has long been a controversial figure in the United States for his views on homosexuality. During California's referendum on [same-sex marriage](#) in 2008, he called homosexuality a "spirit of lawlessness."

Before arriving here last week, Mr. Engle came out with a statement condemning the harsh penalties proposed in the bill, and said that his ministry could not support it. But when he took the stage late on Sunday afternoon, with Ugandan politicians and pastors looking on, he praised the country's "courage" and "righteousness" in promoting the bill.

"NGOs, the [U.N.](#), [Unicef](#), they are all coming in here and promoting an agenda," Mr. Engle said, referring to nongovernmental organizations. "Today, America is losing its religious freedom. We are trying to restrain an agenda that is sweeping through the education system. Uganda has become ground zero."

Politicians here have said no amount of aid cuts or foreign pressure would dissuade them from passing the bill, but the legislation has been stuck in a parliamentary committee since the beginning of the year.

The bill's sponsor, David Bahati, who attended Sunday's service, said in an interview that it was likely that some of its harsher provisions, including the death penalty, would be taken out before its passage, which he said he expected soon. But, he said, the goal of the bill would remain the same. The turnout for the free prayer service, and the support from Mr. Engle, were a good sign, Mr. Bahati said.

Moments after Mr. Engle and his entourage filed off of the athletic grounds, Uganda's minister of ethics, James Buturo, another of the bill's supporters, came on stage and told those assembled: "These are desperate times, but we will not accept intimidation. It is our business to do what God wants. Pray for Bahati, and pray for the bill." And then the rains came.