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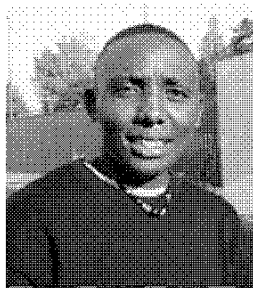
UGANDAN GOVERNMENT CRACKS DOWN ON LGBT RIGHTS

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Written by Sokari Ekine

Tuesday, 10 June 2008

Source: New Internationalist



Victor Mukasa

In August radio presenter Gaetano Kaggwa was suspended for hosting a talk show that included lesbian activist Victor Mukasa - yet another development in the widespread crackdown on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community sweeping Uganda. Two years earlier, Victor, who is chair of SMUG (Sexual Minorities of Uganda), had her home raided by police who confiscated all documents with a homosexual content. A fellow activist from Kenya, Yvonne Oloo, was in the house at the time and was taken to the police station and detained. Members of SMUG believe the raid, and Oloo's detention, was part of an elaborate plan by the Ugandan Government to end LGBT activities.

What the police did not anticipate was that Victor Mukasa would take out an 'Application for enforcement of rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights' in response to the illegal raid and the detention and sexual harassment of Yvonne and herself by the police. The case was heard in May 2007 but the judgment is pending. Despite demands by the LGBT community for equal access to information, materials and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and HIV, the Government continues to exclude them. MP Chris Baryomunsi, of the Parliamentary Committee on HIV and AIDS, has stated that the 'inclusion of gays in the country's AIDS strategy is very expensive for the Government, because of gadgets such as condoms for homosexuals, jellies and lubricants'. A number of organizations that benefit financially from the US 'President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief', such as the Uganda Youth Forum and the Campus Alliance to Wipe Out AIDS, have openly expressed anti-gay feeling, to the point of stating that homosexuals should not receive treatment for HIV.

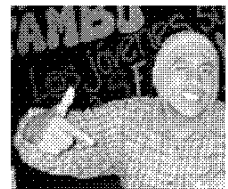
The media has played a key role in the anti-gay campaign, with Government-owned newspaper *New Vision* calling on the police to 'spy on the perverts, arrest and prosecute them'. In a gross violation of human rights, the Ugandan Red Pepper magazine outed gays and lesbians in their September 2006 issue with the headline: 'Kampala's notorious lesbians unearthed'. It then named and printed photographs of alleged lesbians, asking its readers to 'give us the name of the lesbian in your neighbourhood and we will shame her'. Gays and lesbians have since suffered increased violence and many have been unable to return to their homes, families and jobs.

Religious leaders have also contributed to the growing anti-gay movement. In October 2007 Sheikh Ramathan Shaban Mubajje called for gays to be 'marooned on an island in Lake Victoria until they

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die'. Pastor Martin Ssempe of Makerere University has been one of Uganda's most vocal anti-gay leaders and is a member of the Church Interfaith Family Culture Coalition Against Homosexuality. He recently led an anti-gay rally in Kampala which included government ministers. The Coalition has also been responsible for outing lesbians and gays by posting their photos, names and addresses on to a website.

President Yoweri Museveni's Government has been at the forefront of the campaign against the LGBT community ever since it signed a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. In November 2007 it refused to allow representatives of the LGBT community to speak at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kampala. Members of the East African LGBT community gathered at the 'People's Space' to address the meeting. They were denied access, beaten and forcibly removed by the police. But LGBT and human rights activists in Uganda vow to continue their struggle.

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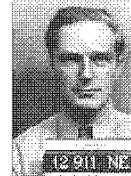
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