



September 30, 2008

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Gay refugee claim accepted Ugandan says persecution common back home

By **TOM GODFREY, SUN MEDIA**

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TORONTO -- A gay Ugandan man -- one of 150 mostly HIV-positive delegates who remained in Toronto after an International Aids Conference -- was declared a refugee by a board yesterday.

Ismail Mulawa, 30, appeared before the Immigration and Refugee Board in downtown Toronto and told member Tom Pinkney it is illegal to be gay in Uganda and he faces life in jail if forced to go home.

Mulawa said he'll be arrested at the airport and taken to jail on arrival in Kampala.

Pinkney found Mulawa to be a credible witness and granted him asylum in Canada. He will be able to apply for permanent residence now and citizenship in two years.

"Canada is a land of freedom for me and so many people," Mulawa said at the hearing yesterday. "I am starting my life all over from new again."

Mulawa was among 150 delegates from more than 50 countries who claimed status after an August 2006 conference attended by 24,000 participants.

"Toronto is a very gay-friendly city and the people are understanding," he said. "The conference was one of the few ways for me to leave Uganda."

Mulawa, who works as a duct cleaner in Edmonton, said two of his gay friends in Uganda were jailed last week as part of a police crackdown on homosexuals.

"I fear for my family back at home," he said. "Canada is a free country and this is where I want to live."

Mulawa's lawyer, El-Farouk Khaki, who represents more than 40 of the delegates who stayed in Toronto, said about 75% of those who've had hearings were accepted as refugees.

"Some are HIV-positive and some are not," he said yesterday. "They are all from different countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America."

He said a Ugandan police crackdown on gays and lesbians is worsening, and Ugandan newspapers routinely "out" gays and lesbians by publishing their names.

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- Green
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photo OF THE DAY



opinion Right down east



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Columnist **TOM BRODBECK**





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