

US slams Uganda's new anti-gay bill

(AFP) – 1 day ago

KAMPALA — If Uganda's recently tabled Anti-Homosexuality Bill becomes law it would mark a major setback in the promotion of human rights, the US embassy in Kampala told AFP Thursday.

"If adopted, a bill further criminalising homosexuality would constitute a significant step backwards for the protection of human rights in Uganda," the embassy's public affairs officer Joann Lockard said in an email.

"We urge states to take all necessary measures to ensure that sexual orientation or gender identity may under no circumstances be the basis for criminal penalties, in particular executions, arrests, or detention."

Addressing journalists on Thursday, Ugandan Ethics Minister James Nsaba Buturo said the country had no intention of heeding the advice of foreigners on the issue of homosexuality.

"They have come to me in great numbers and we are discussing it diplomatically but we are also telling them to mind their own business. They have no mandate whatsoever to come and say: 'Your values are wrong, mine are right'," he said.

Buturo balked at the notion that the proposed bill -- which, among other things, would criminalise any public discussion of homosexuality and could penalise an individual who knowingly rented property to a homosexual -- constituted a human rights violation.

"We are really getting tired of this phrase human rights. It is being abused. Anything goes, and if you are challenged? 'Oh, it's my right'," the minister snapped.

"Anal sex? Human rights. Robbery? Human rights. All sort of nonsense? Human rights," an exasperated Buturo went on.

Asked about donor nations and sexual rights campaigners who have voiced opposition to the bill, Buturo was again defiant.

"We have told those sources we are not going to compromise our integrity. And they are appalled. They cannot believe that Uganda says, on certain issues we are not going to sell our soul," he said.

Homosexuality -- or "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" as it is currently described in existing laws -- is already illegal in Uganda and can be punished with life imprisonment.

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