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Uganda

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

March 11, 2008

Excerpt:

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Homosexuals faced widespread discrimination and legal restrictions. It is illegal for homosexuals to engage in sexual acts, based on a legal provision that criminalizes "carnal acts against the order of nature" with a penalty of life imprisonment.

Public resentment against homosexuality sparked demonstrations and significant public debate during the year. The government took a strong position against the practice. A local NGO, Sexual Minorities in Uganda, protested several members' alleged harassment by police for their vocal stand against sexual discrimination.

On September 10, the Red Pepper tabloid published a list of 40 first names of alleged homosexual men residing in Kampala. There were no confirmed reports of arrests, as originally reported, based on a similar list published by the same tabloid in August 2006.

International and local NGOs, in cooperation with the government, sponsored public awareness campaigns that aimed to eliminate the stigma of HIV/AIDS. Counseling and testing for HIV/AIDS was free and available at health centers and local NGOs across the country. Counselors encouraged patients to be tested with their partners and family so that they all received information about living with HIV/AIDS. Persons living with HIV/AIDS formed support groups to promote awareness in their communities.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association, and the government generally respected these rights.

The government announced it would initiate new regulations to provide a framework under which NGOs and churches would operate, following increased reports in July about their illegal activity, including extortion, fraud, trafficking in persons, and homosexual practices. The NGO Board said it would institute a survey to scrutinize the activities of 7,000 registered NGOs, including churches.

NGOs continued to express concerns about the NGO Registration Act, passed in April 2006, which requires most NGOs, including religious organizations, to renew their registration permits annually. NGOs operating in the north also expressed concern over increased government interference in their activities. Government officials accused the NGOs of exploiting the situation in the north and of not using funds for planned activities. The NGO Forum, a group of local NGOs, initiated an investigation into the government's allegations.

The government's human rights record remained poor. Although there were improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained, including unlawful killings by security forces; instances of torture and abuse of suspects by security forces; vigilante justice; harsh prison conditions; official impunity; arbitrary arrest; incommunicado and lengthy pretrial detention; restrictions on the right to a fair trial and on freedoms of speech, press, and association; some limits on freedom of religion; sexual abuse of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in camps; restrictions on opposition parties; electoral violence and irregularities; government corruption; violence and discrimination against women and children, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual abuse of children; trafficking in persons; violence and discrimination against persons with disabilities and homosexuals; and forced labor, including by children.