

## **Anti-Homosexuality Act Approved as Law in Uganda**

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Earlier this year, on 31 March 2023 the president of Uganda Yoweri Museveni signed a new Anti-Homosexuality Bill into legislation. These new laws also include the death penalty for ‘aggravated cases’ of homosexuality in Uganda. The Bill was supported by a number of countries in the east of Africa. At the signing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, President Museveni expressed that Uganda would “not embrace homosexuality and the West should stop seeking to impose its views”. Like many other African leaders, Museveni believes that being homosexual is “un-African”. Museveni also has support among other Ugandan lawmakers and politicians, with the Bill being passed in the Ugandan parliament a few weeks later, in May 2023.

The Anti-Homosexuality Bill was also condemned by many human rights and LGBTQIA+ activists and organisations in Africa. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April a protest march against Uganda’s new Bill. It was led by Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema and consisted of activists and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, organisations such as Access Chapter 2, and the African National Congress’s (ANC’s) Women’s League among others. The protesters marched to the Ugandan embassy to call for the Ugandan president to reverse this Bill.

The approval of the Bill as Ugandan law has proven to be detrimental to many members of the queer community in Uganda. Within a week of the signing of the Bill, PASSOP (People Against Suffering Suppression Oppression and Poverty), a non-profit human rights organisation from Cape Town received a number of queer people who left Uganda to seek refuge in South Africa.

The ‘Kill the Gays Bill’ as it is now commonly known, includes sentences of up to 20 years in prison for practising homosexuality; the death penalty for ‘aggravated’ homosexuality (including but not limited to homosexual acts with children under 18 years old, homosexual acts with any other categories of vulnerable people, and homosexual acts as a person living with HIV).

Any content seen to promote and/or support homosexuality has been banned from all media groups and social media platforms. Landlords that house homosexuals also face time in prison and anyone who fails to report any acts of homosexuality may face up to 6 months in prison. All organisations that are affiliated with the LGBTQIA+ community have been shut down and any organisation that supports the LGBTQIA+ community financially or otherwise has also been ordered to stop immediately or face serious charges, resulting in prosecution and possible imprisonment.

Bontle Khalo from Ekurhuleni Pride Organising Committee (EPOC) spoke to *Karibu!* on behalf of the organisation: “As the Ekurhuleni Pride Organising Committee (EPOC LGBTQIA+), we are deeply saddened, disappointed, and shocked by what is currently happening in Uganda. The fact that we marched to the Ugandan Embassy several times means that we are there for the Ugandan queer community and were hopeful that the Bill would be reconsidered or completely removed.”

“We previously fought against David Bahati when he introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2014 and almost 10 years later the Anti-Homosexuality Bill is now the law in

Uganda, regardless of several pleas and letters to the Ugandan government to put this harsh Bill to an end.”

Khalo continued; “South Africa should continue to support and aid our comrades in Uganda by creating safe houses and financial assistance in order to lessen the burden and fear which they now live in. They shouldn't have to suffer alone. Just because we have a constitution that shields us, it does not mean that we do not have our own struggles, but at least we know that homophobic and transphobic hate crimes are punishable according to our law. The struggles continues and we will keep on fighting until justice prevails. Until we are all free, none of us are free.”

Clare Byarugaba, a Ugandan LGBTQIA+ rights activist said: “The Ugandan President has ... Legalised State Sponsored Homophobia and Transphobia. It's a very dark and sad day. We shall continue to fight this atrocious legislation through the Judiciary until Human Rights for all are upheld.”

It is quite important that people understand the extreme consequences of this Bill to the queer community that lives in Uganda. Many members of the queer community in Uganda will end up homeless and be vulnerable to being attacked in the street by other citizens. Many members of the queer community may end up taking their own lives at the prospect of imprisonment or death on the basis of who they are. There needs to be a stronger stand by African leaders and organisations to bring an end to this Bill.

*This article is an opinion piece submitted on 06 June 2023. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of Karibu! Online or Khanya College. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online ([www.Karibu.org.za](http://www.Karibu.org.za)), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.*