

Uganda's anti-gay bill had U.S. Christian church support

Written by

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(GIN) – A bill before the Ugandan parliament that would punish practicing homosexuals with life in prison—or, in some cases, death— was crafted with help from overseas conservative Christian leaders, according to local reports.

U.S. conservative Christian leaders reportedly helped lay the groundwork for the bill at a conference last March. Since then, some have backed away from its severe penalties.

Florida-based Exodus International, the largest ministry seeking to convert gays to heterosexual lifestyles, wrote in a letter to Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni: "While we do not believe that homosexual behavior is what God intended for individuals, we believe that deprivation of life and liberty is not an appropriate or helpful response to this issue."

"Furthermore, the Christian church must be a safe, compassionate place for gay-identified people as well as those who are confused about and conflicted by their sexuality."

The liberal Washington, DC-based Faith in Public Life, in a letter signed by dozens of American Christian leaders, wrote: "Given (our) extensive history of involvement in Uganda, "these (undersigned) Catholic, Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant leaders . . . feel especially compelled to speak out against the 'Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2009' as an affront to Christian values and call on all American Christian leaders to join them."

The Uganda Feminist Forum joined Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and 14 other NGOs in demanding that the bill be withdrawn.

David Kato of Sexual Minorities Uganda said: "This Bill is a blow to the progress of democracy in Uganda. It goes against the inclusive spirit necessary for our economic as well as political development. Its spirit is profoundly undemocratic and un-African."

Homosexuality is already illegal in Uganda, but the proposed act would mandate a seven-year

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prison term for anyone who has gay sex or "attempts to commit the offense" of homosexuality, and anyone who fails to report homosexuals within 24 hours of discovering their behavior can be punished by up to three years in prison. Those who commit what is called "aggravated homosexuality" -- defined as having gay sex with disabled people or anyone under 18, or when the accused is HIV-positive -- could be executed.