



ATTENTION: THE HON. EDWARD SSEKANDI KIWANUKA

Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda
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Dear Honorable Speaker

OPEN LETTER TO PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA REGARDING
THE ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY BILL 2009

The Southern African HIV Clinicians Society is an association of over 16 000 health care workers in the field of HIV throughout sub-Saharan Africa. On behalf of our members, we wish to raise our grave concern regarding the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009, which we understand is currently before the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Uganda. We would greatly appreciate it if a copy of this letter could be circulated to all Members of Parliament.

Our concern regarding the Anti-Homosexuality Bill stems from the fact that it proposes draconian measures which will further criminalize same-sex relations between consenting adults. We are particularly concerned that the Bill proposes the introduction of the death penalty for, *inter alia*, people living with HIV who engage in same-sex sexual activities.

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The world applauds the excellent work that Uganda has done in de-stigmatizing HIV and promoting openness and acceptance regarding HIV in Ugandan society. Encouraging openness and combating stigma are widely recognized as key components of Uganda's successful campaign to reduce HIV infection. However, the Anti-Homosexuality Bill threatens to undermine Uganda's campaign against HIV in a number of fundamental respects:

1. The measures proposed by the Bill will lead to the persecution of people who engage in same-sex relations. There is a large amount of international research which demonstrates that when specific groups are subject to victimization, stigma and discrimination, they are less able to access health care services, which is particularly detrimental to public health measures in the context of the HIV pandemic.
2. By specifically targeting gay, lesbian and bisexual people who are living with HIV, the Bill will discourage such people from testing for HIV, knowing their status and accessing treatment. This will inevitably result in an increase in new HIV infections.
3. The Bill seeks to criminalize "the promotion of homosexuality", which includes funding organizations that work with lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, and the publication of material relating to these groups. In effect, this will mean that civil society organizations will not be able to provide outreach and health information to the gay, lesbian and bisexual community in Uganda. Preventing the dissemination of information on HIV prevention to a vulnerable group such as men who have sexual relations with other men will inevitably lead to a higher incidence of HIV in Ugandan society.
4. If the Bill is passed into law, Uganda will necessarily have to withdraw from international human rights conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention

on the Rights of the Child; and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Since the protection of human rights is an important aspect of reducing stigma regarding HIV, any deterioration in the human rights situation in Uganda will seriously undermine the work that has already been done in promoting openness and preventing new HIV infections.

We therefore strongly believe that the Bill will have profoundly negative impact on Uganda's efforts to combat HIV, and we call on all Members of Parliament who are committed to public health and human rights to ensure that this Bill is not passed into law in any form.

We hope that the above concerns will be given consideration during your deliberations on the Bill.

Yours Sincerely



Francois Venter

President: Southern African HIV Clinicians Society

On behalf of the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society Executive Committee

CC: HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI

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CC: MR MED KAGGWA, CHAIR OF THE UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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