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anti-LGBTQ law including death penalty

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Reuters

May 29, 2023 6:40 AM PDT · Updated an hour ago



Nigeria's Tinubu sworn in as president



Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni speaks during a Reuters interview at his farm in Kisozi settlement of Gomba district, in the Central Region of Uganda, January 16, 2022. REUTERS/Abubaker Lubowa/File Photo

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**Law punishes 'aggravated
homosexuality' with death**

Widespread condemnation from West

LGBTQ activists vow court challenge

KAMPALA, May 29 (Reuters) - Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has signed one of the world's toughest **anti-LGBTQ laws**, including the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality", drawing Western condemnations and risking sanctions from aid donors.

Same-sex relations were already illegal in Uganda, as in more than **30 African countries**, but the **new law** goes much further.

It stipulates capital punishment for "serial offenders" against the law and transmission of a terminal illness like HIV/AIDS through gay sex. It also decrees a 20-year sentence for "promoting" homosexuality.

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"The Ugandan president has today legalised state-sponsored homophobia and transphobia," said Clare Byarugaba, a Ugandan rights activist. "It's a very dark and sad day for the LGBTIQ community, our allies and all of Uganda."

She and other **activists** have vowed a legal challenge to the law, which Museveni was shown signing at his desk with a golden pen in a photo tweeted by the presidency. The 78-year-old leader has called homosexuality a "deviation from normal" and urged lawmakers to resist "imperialist" pressure.

Museveni had sent the original bill passed in March back to lawmakers, asking them to tone down some provisions. But his ultimate approval was not seen as in doubt in a conservative country where anti-LGBTQ attitudes have hardened in recent years, in part due to campaigning by Western evangelical church groups.

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Uganda receives billions of dollars in foreign aid each year and could now face sanctions.

The bill's sponsor, Asuman Basalirwa, told reporters that parliament speaker Anita Among's U.S. visa was cancelled after the law was signed. Among and the U.S. embassy in Uganda did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The White House condemned the bill passed in March, and last month, the U.S. government

said it was assessing the implications of the legislation for activities in Uganda under PEPFAR, its flagship HIV/AIDS programme.

In a joint statement on Monday, PEPFAR, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said the law put Uganda's anti-HIV fight "in grave jeopardy".

'DRACONIAN AND DISCRIMINATORY'

Dominic Arnall, chief executive of Open For Business, a coalition of companies that includes Google ([GOOGL.O](#)) and Microsoft ([MSFT.O](#)), said the group was deeply disappointed.

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"Our data shows that this law runs counter to the interests of economic progress and prosperity of all people in Uganda," he said.

The European Union reiterated a condemnation from March while the United Nations human rights body said the law was a recipe for systematic violation of Ugandans' rights.

"We are appalled that the draconian and discriminatory anti-gay bill is now law," it

tweeted.

Uganda's move could encourage lawmakers in neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania seeking similar measures.

The inclusion of the death penalty for offences like transmitting HIV has drawn particular outrage.

Existing Ugandan law calls for a maximum 10-year sentence for intentionally transmitting HIV and does not apply when the person who contracted the infection was aware of their sexual partner's HIV status.

By contrast, the new law makes no distinction between intentional and unintentional transmission and contains no exception based on awareness of HIV status.

The amended version of the bill, adopted earlier this month after Museveni returned it to parliament, stipulated that merely identifying as LGBTQ is not a crime and revised a measure that obliged people to report homosexual

activity to only require reporting when a child is involved.

LGBTQ Ugandans called those changes useless, saying law enforcement regularly exceeds its legal authorities to harass them. They said passage of the bill in March **unleashed** a wave of arrests, evictions and mob attacks.

The issue has been a long-running one in Uganda.

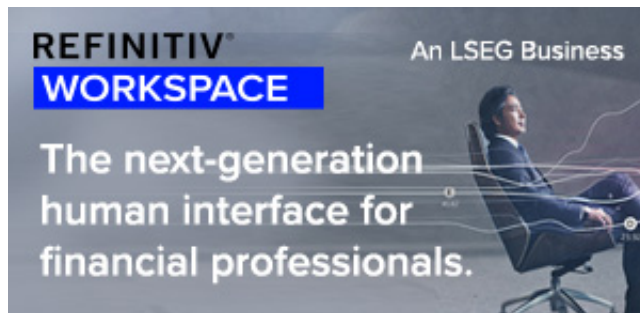
A less restrictive 2014 anti-LGBTQ law was struck down by a Ugandan court on procedural grounds, after Western governments had initially suspended some aid, imposed visa restrictions and curtailed security cooperation.

In 2009, a bill dubbed "kill the gays" for initially proposing executing homosexuals was introduced after a conference in Kampala drew representatives from the United States including prominent anti-gay evangelical Scott Lively.

As well as religious campaigning, Africa's anti-LGBTQ attitudes also have their roots in the colonial era, including an anti-sodomy section of Britain's penal code. By the time the UK legalised same-sex acts in 1967, many former colonies were independent and did not inherit the legal change.

Reporting by Reuters reporters in East Africa; Additional reporting by Rachel Savage in Johannesburg, Foo Yun Chee in Brussels; Writing by George Obulutsa; Editing by Aaron Ross, Andrew Cawthorne and Giles Elgood

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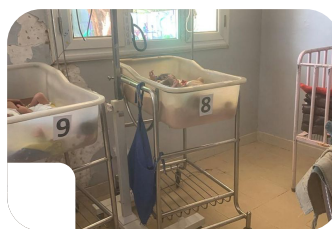
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Middle East · May 29, 2023 · 3:28 AM PDT

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