

Synopsis:

## **PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN UGANDA**

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Uganda - 2010 / 2011

Uganda has criminalized homosexuality for over a century. Yet today, one of the most punitive laws against homosexuality ever conceived threatens the lives of the country's gays and lesbians. Ugandan legislator David Bahati, a member of the United States-based fundamentalist Christian group The Family, introduced the law in parliament. If passed, it could lead to the execution of people who have gay sex more than once, the imprisonment of heterosexual people who fail to turn gays and lesbians over to the police, and the abolition of all organizations that support LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) rights.

The possible passage of the law hangs like a Damocles sword over the LGBT community in Uganda. Each day that no decisive action is taken to throw out the bill, it encourages homophobia to spread and allow political and religious leaders to scapegoat the LGBT community for society's ills and their own personal gain. Hundreds of men and women have already been "outed" by tabloid newspaper in Uganda. Their names, photos and addresses are regularly published under headlines such as "More homos faces exposed" and "Men of Shame".

I started this project to tell the stories of LGBT human rights defenders living and working in this environment. There is, for example, Auf Usaam Mukwaya, a 26-year-old gay man who has been involved in gay rights activism for years. Consequent to that, he has been arrested and jailed twice, and harassed and threatened by neighbors after being outed in a local paper and identified by name and picture on television. Part of my work document his story of enduring prejudice, discrimination and loss. A story shared by most of the LGBT community. This draconian new law, if passed, is tantamount to a death sentence for all of them.

By contrasting images of this community with photographs depicting the increasingly hostile environment in which they live, I aim to honor the bravery of those who have decided to fight against the bill while others look away. If the bill passes, persecution against the LGBT community will increase. Yet this bill has also strengthened the Ugandan LGBT community's solidarity and its struggle to continue fighting for equality.

This story is not only about being LGBT in Uganda, but also about the common struggle for equality for the LGBT community globally.

## UPDATE:

Five years ago, Ugandan legislator David Bahati introduced the Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill which was passed by the Ugandan Parliament on December 2013, with the death penalty proposal dropped in favour of life in prison. **The draconian bill was signed into law by the President of Uganda on February 2014.** The bill criminalize same-sex relations in Uganda, and includes penalties for individuals, companies, media organizations, or non-governmental organizations that know of gay people or support LGBT rights. Homosexual acts are already illegal in Uganda and punishable by up to 14 years in prison. **On August 2014, the Constitutional Court of Uganda ruled the law invalid. But David Bahati has announced that the government will appeal to overturn the ruling.** This story is not only about being LGBT in Uganda, but also about the common struggle for equality for the LGBT community globally.

My photo story documents the gay activists standing up to this hate, including the story of one activist, Auf Usaam Mukwaya, who was forced to flee to France. I have also photographed the politicians and church leaders supporting the bill, many inspired by homophobic rhetoric exported by US evangelicals, closeted homosexuals, secret bars, manifestations...