

International Human Rights Day in the U.S. and the connection to the rights of sexual minorities in Uganda

International Human Rights Day (IHRD) is approaching. It is observed worldwide annually on December 10th commemorating the day in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR). The declaration is available [online](#). Everyone is encouraged to read the 30 Articles covering rights of equality, dignity, peace, justice, education, and many others designed to protect the inherent humanity and dignity of all people everywhere. It guarantees basic necessities of life such as housing and food. All of the human rights guaranteed by the various articles in the UDHR are then themselves guaranteed by Article 28 which says "*Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.*"

Included in the 'Everyone' of the declaration is the gay community - the sexual minorities worldwide (i.e., lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/questioning [LGBTQ] people) . The very first article of the UDHR declares "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood*". In that light we are forced to ask which part of executing gays in Uganda or jailing them in Nigeria is acting towards each other "*in a spirit of brotherhood*"?

We have just had the Transgender Day of Remembrance worldwide on November 20th. This year the vigil remembered the 265 reported deaths of transgender/transsexual people worldwide. That number rises every year and still only accounts for reports from less than half of the world. Where was their guarantee of "*dignity and rights*"?

Last week the United Nations included 'sexual orientation and gender identity' in a resolution condemning discrimination based executions. It was only two years ago that the UN dropped sexual orientation from their list of condemned killings but finally they are stepping up to protect sexual minorities. Will this gain the "*social and international order*" so promised by the UDHR?

At the United Nations for last year's International Human Rights Day, Hilary Clinton said that "It is violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation, or because they do not conform to cultural norms about how men and women should look or behave. It is a violation of human rights when governments declare it illegal to be gay, or allow those who harm gay people to go unpunished. It is a violation of human rights when lesbian or transgendered women are subjected to so-called corrective rape, or forcibly subjected to hormone treatments, or when people are murdered after public calls for violence toward gays, or when they are forced to flee their nations and seek asylum in other lands to save their lives."

Yet this is exactly what has been and continues to happen in Uganda. So how can the international community, the United Nations and United States, stand by and watch Uganda pass their notorious Anti-Homosexuality Bill (AHB), which may in it's final form include a death penalty, and most definitely includes penalties including life imprisonment and long prison sentences for both LGBT people and their allies? The AHB is a clear violation of international human rights laws and the UDHR. The bill simply being introduced has created an atmosphere of witch hunts and scape-goating causing deaths, and suicide, and resulting in many Ugandans fleeing their own country seeking refuge abroad.

Earlier this week, Hilary Clinton reaffirmed the State Department and US Government's support of human rights for the LGBT community in her speech at the Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies (GLIFAA)

saying “our commitment to the human rights of all people has to be a continuing obligation and mission of everyone who serves in the government of the United States.” So what is the US Government doing to assure the rights and safety of the sexual minorities of Uganda? What will the international community do to protect them should this bill pass and the feared mob rule that will follow?

It is with this year’s International Human Rights Day as the backdrop that the Stop The Hate and Homophobia Coalition of Springfield will host Frank Mugisha of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) on December 7th for a discussion of his group’s fight against the Anti-Homophobia Bill in Uganda, the bill which earned the name ‘Kill the Gays Bill’ for its death penalty clause. Spurred by American Evangelicals into believing that gays are out to recruit children, and that gays can change their born-in innate orientation through prayer and other means of ‘therapy and other baseless lies, the Ugandan Parliament created what has to be considered the largest travesty on human rights in the world with their bill.

The Ugandan government is legislating that friends, neighbors and family members must turn in anyone they suspect might be gay; they are legislating that landlords who provide housing or that health care givers that provide life saving healthcare, must turn in anyone they suspect to authorities; they are seeking extradition back to Uganda for any Ugandan committing these so-called crimes outside of their country such as those that flee the witch hunts and gain asylum elsewhere.

How are these not all human rights violations? How does this bill not violate basic non discrimination laws? It goes against their own Constitution but that is not stopping the Ugandan government. The United States government, through the State Department, has just warned the Ugandan government that the bill violates their existing international human rights obligations. But what are they doing to kill this bill once and for all?

And how do we stand by as individuals and not raise our voices to the human rights violations, and to call out those who have played a hand in the campaigns of misinformation, especially those from our own country who travel freely to impose their own twisted views abroad that have led to an environment of fear and hatred and homophobia? Some of those American Evangelical religious leaders who participated in the seminars and meetings that led to this catastrophic bill have now recanted. Exodus International (the self-proclaimed global leader in ex-gay conversion/reparative therapy) now admits that one cannot simply pray away the gay or change their inherent orientation, but where are they now that those whom they have inflicting their lies upon needs them? The AHB is filled with clauses allowing agreement to reparative therapy as an alternative to prison. Where is their campaign of truth with facts and love?

But, also, many of the American Evangelical leaders are now cheering on passage of the bill. Their voices of prejudice and their trampling of the dignity and guaranteed human rights must be drowned out. The two most repeated words in the UDHR is ‘everyone’ and ‘no-one’. Clearly we all must stand up for everyone so that no-one is denied the universal human rights to which they are entitled. It has been said that as individuals, we must commit ourselves to the grassroots changes in human society that no government can legislate. And, that those changes are very difficult. We must dedicate ourselves to honoring the UDHR by helping to make it a reality everywhere. Won’t you join us?

Stop the Hate and Homophobia will be doing a standout Friday December 7th at the Federal Courthouse from 3-4pm to urge everyone to stand up for the rights guaranteed for all in Universal Declaration, and to call out those in our community that wage a campaign of lies and hate seeking to deny those rights. The standout will be followed by a potluck reception with Frank Mugisha of SMUG starting at 5pm at OutNOW located at 32 Hampden St.