



# “They’re Putting Our Lives at Risk”

How Uganda’s Anti-LGBT Climate Unleashes Abuse

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH



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## Summary

Since President Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986, his government has imposed restrictions on the rights to free expression, assembly, and association. These restrictions have been particularly severe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and those working to advance their rights. Although the criminalization of same-sex conduct in Uganda dates back to British colonial rule, Museveni's government has ramped up crackdowns and discrimination against LGBT people to unprecedented heights, culminating in the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, one of the world's harshest anti-LGBT laws, in May 2023.

In the two years preceding the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, LGBT people were vilified in the Ugandan media, as high profile political and government figures used traditional and social media to spread misinformation and incite hatred against LGBT people, drumming up public support for the proposed law. This hostile environment, fueled also by cultural and religious leaders, led to an uptick in attacks and harassment targeting LGBT people and groups that support them in Uganda.

This report documents the actions by public figures and entities, including parliamentarians and government institutions, that culminated in the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. It outlines the rights violations enabled by the law and examines the devastating impact on the lives of LGBT people, activists, allies, and their families in Uganda.

Human Rights Watch found both in the lead up to, and since the enactment of, the Anti-Homosexuality Act, that public figures have engaged in virulent homophobic rhetoric and the government has carried out multiple anti-LGBT measures which have and are shaping negative discourse about LGBT people in Uganda, encouraging attacks and harassment against individuals and independent organizations perceived as supportive of LGBT rights.

During this period authorities have raided and suspended nongovernmental organizations, conducted arbitrary arrests and detentions, engaged in entrapment via social media and dating apps, and extorted money from LGBT people in exchange for releasing them from police custody. Ugandan authorities have also failed to hold to account individuals responsible for physical and sexual violence and online harassment against LGBT people.

The state-sponsored anti-LGBT rhetoric, impunity for attacks, as well as now-defunct provisions of the law that violated the right to housing, created a permissive environment for sexual and other forms of violence against LGBT people as well as other violations and abuses including evictions and harassment. Human Rights Watch found that these abuses have affected a wide range of people and intensified existing vulnerabilities, harming the rights of many seeking to access essential services such as health care and housing, especially women and other at-risk groups.

The Ugandan government is obligated to respect and protect the rights to freedom of opinion and of expression for all people in and subject to its jurisdiction, as well as the right to privacy. It also has a duty to counter hate speech and to ensure accountability for those that engage in abusive and discriminatory conduct against people on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Government agencies and officials as well as others who effectively wield governmental authority should refrain from speech advocating violence, discrimination or hostility toward any individual or social group. Those in a position of governmental authority should speak out to dissuade others from engaging in discriminatory conduct. Human Rights Watch found that the Ugandan government has failed to act in accordance with its duty in this regard.

Uganda also has obligations under international law to ensure access to employment, health care, education, and housing without discrimination based on prohibited grounds, which includes sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Human Rights Watch found that the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act violates human rights, and that the government of Uganda has not only systematically failed to prevent widespread discrimination against LGBT people but has facilitated it.

Ugandan authorities should end their clampdown on LGBT rights groups, refrain from engaging in anti-LGBT rhetoric and hate speech and ensure that those responsible for anti-LGBT rhetoric and hate speech that constitutes incitement, criminal conduct such as assaults against LGBT people, and other human rights abuses are held to account. The government should repeal the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act and the Penal Code provisions criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct between adults. It should introduce comprehensive equality and non-discrimination legislation that would protect everyone from violence and discrimination including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

## **Recommendations**

### **To the President of the Republic of Uganda**

- Publicly condemn acts of discrimination and violence against people targeted because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, as well as those who express support for LGBT rights and urge others to refrain from engaging in discriminatory conduct and hate speech.
- Publicly oppose the criminalization of consensual same-sex conduct and propose legislation to repeal section 145 of the penal code, the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, and the prohibition of same-sex marriage under the Ugandan constitution.

### **To the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organisations and the Uganda Registration Services Bureau**

- Ensure nongovernmental organizations focusing on the protection and promotion of sexual and reproductive rights, including LGBT rights, are allowed to register and operate without any hindrance.

### **To the Parliament of Uganda**

- Repeal the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.
- Repeal all Penal Code provisions that criminalize adult consensual same-sex conduct.
- Introduce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression including in the provision of goods and services, whether public or private, essential to the rights to employment, health including psychosocial support, education, and housing. Ensure full and meaningful public participation in the promulgation of any such legislation.
- Amend the Parliamentary Rules of Procedure, including the Code of Conduct, to prohibit speech in Parliament that incites violence, hostility or discrimination against a particular population or community, including against LGBT persons, with appropriate sanctions for parliamentarians who violate the rules.



## **To the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Uganda Police Force**

- Issue instructions to the Uganda Police Force to end arrests based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and to stop raiding the offices of LGBT rights organizations.
- Investigate, discipline or cooperate in the prosecution of police officers or other government officials who are accused of extorting individuals under threat of being arrested or prosecuted under anti-LGBT provisions.
- Ensure that any officers who may receive complaints of violence against LGBT people are trained on sexual orientation and gender identity to assist them in identifying bias-motivated crimes, and that they systematically ask complainants to indicate whether they (or the victim) may have been victimized on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.
- Conduct effective investigations into crimes against people who have been targeted on the basis of their presumed sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, with a view to securing successful prosecutions.
- Expressly prohibit police officers and other officials from ordering or cooperating with anal testing, making clear it constitutes prohibited ill-treatment and that sanctions will be pursued against those who are implicated in carrying it out.

## **To the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP)**

- Suspend and do not pursue criminal prosecutions of any offences under the Anti-Homosexuality Act, on the grounds that such prosecutions would constitute violations of Uganda's obligations under international human rights law.
- Take all necessary measures to secure the successful prosecution of individuals responsible for crimes against people on the basis of their presumed sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.
- Ensure that all authorities dealing with complaints of violence against LGBT people are trained on sexual orientation and gender identity to assist them in identifying bias-motivated crimes, and that they systematically ask complainants to indicate whether they (or the victim) may have been victimized on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.
- Issue instructions that anal testing is prohibited as a form of unlawful ill-treatment, that it is never admissible evidence to establish any wrongdoing, and that those who are implicated in anal testing in any way will be sanctioned appropriately.

## **To the Ministry of Health**

- Prohibit any healthcare provider, private or public, from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression in the provision of healthcare goods and services.
- Provide specialized services for LGBT people in public hospitals to promote and ensure better mental, sexual and reproductive health, including specially trained workers and confidential services, to fill the gaps created by the banning of and state-led restrictions on LGBT rights organizations.
- Train public health officials and medical practitioners, including through relevant standards and accreditation systems, on prohibited forms of discrimination against LGBT people.
- Implement reporting mechanisms for patients, medical practitioners, and employees in healthcare settings to anonymously report instances of medical discrimination.
- Issue a directive banning anal testing.

## **To the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, National Information Technology Authority-Uganda, and the Uganda Communications Commission**

- Provide specific guidelines prohibiting speech constituting incitement to violence or hostility against specific individuals, populations or communities, and promoting non-discrimination for all people, including sexual and gender minorities, online, in government publications and in the media by government officials.
- Develop programs to counter harmful incitement speech, including anti-LGBT speech, through affirmative or non-punitive measures, for example public education, publicly countering incendiary misinformation, and strengthening security to protect sexual and gender minorities.

## **To Independent Media, Traditional, Religious, and Nongovernmental Organizations**

- Provide training for staff on inclusive programming and non-discrimination, including specific guidance on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Refrain from amplifying anti-LGBT rhetoric and hate speech in programming, including language and imagery that perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatization, and develop guidelines for countering misinformation and hate speech targeting LGBT people.

## **To Digital Platforms, including Meta’s platforms, TikTok, YouTube, and Grindr**

- Ensure platforms are adequately staffed to develop and enforce policy that meets the needs of LGBT people in Uganda and build trust with groups defending their rights. This includes hiring enough representatives and diverse staff from the region who are proficient in all major Ugandan languages and are supportive of LGBT rights and training such staff on the human rights implications of digital targeting against marginalized groups such as LGBT people, as well as how to recognize and identify hate speech in the Ugandan context.
- Engage meaningfully with organizations defending LGBT and digital rights in Uganda on the development of policies and features, from design to implementation and enforcement, including on content moderation and trust and safety strategies that prioritize the concerns of LGBT people.
- Establish direct lines of communication between users and local advocacy and support groups for rapid response to anti-LGBT hate speech and harassment on their platforms.

## **To Donors Funding Human Rights Work in Uganda**

- Prioritize intersectional approaches that recognize sexual and gender diversity, and support organizations that address these intersecting issues.
- Encourage organizations not to overlook LGBT issues but instead include them in their local and national human rights agenda.

- Assess immediate and urgent gaps in support resulting from program terminations and donor withdrawal of funds and consider stop-gap funding to maintain vital programming for LGBT people.
- Ensure that concerns over the human rights impacts of anti-LGBT laws and policies continue to be raised publicly and privately with high-level Ugandan officials.
- Provide continuous support to LGBT rights groups to do online and/or remote work.

### **To the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)**

- Publicly denounce the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act and issue a strong statement condemning the law as a violation of fundamental human rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, particularly Article 2 (non-discrimination), Article 3 (equality before the law), and Article 5 (prohibition of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment).
- Formally request the Ugandan authorities to repeal the Anti-Homosexuality Act.
- Issue policy and legal guidance to African Union Member States on ensuring respect, protection, and fulfillment of LGBT persons' human rights without discrimination.

## Methodology

Human Rights Watch conducted the research for this report between August 2022 and April 2025. Most interviews were conducted in 2023, coinciding with the passage of the law, with additional follow-up interviews in 2024 and 2025.

This report is based on interviews with 59 people including LGBT people, representatives of LGBT rights organizations, activists, journalists, and lawmakers. The interviewees include five gay men, six transgender women, two lesbian women, two transgender men, and one non-binary queer individual.

A review of the Parliamentary Hansard during house debates for the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, speeches by President Museveni, other government figures, and religious leaders during the lead up to the introduction of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Parliament, as well as media reporting, particularly between November 2022 and April 2023 also form the foundation of this report.

In addition, Human Rights Watch reviewed legal documents, including laws, court decisions, and other material related to human rights in Uganda. Human Rights Watch also reviewed other secondary sources including nongovernmental organizations' (NGO) reports and media articles.

Interviews were conducted in person, and remotely, via phone or video call in English and Luganda. When Luganda was used, an interpreter translated the interview into English. Researchers took steps to ensure that all in-person interviews were in settings with regard for the privacy and security of the interviewees. Secure messaging applications were used for phone interviews.

All interviewees gave their informed consent and were informed they could stop the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions. Interviewees were not compensated for the interviews. The names of most interviewees and the locations at which we spoke with them have been withheld for safety reasons. Some interviewees have been assigned a pseudonym in this report that bears no relation to their real name.

On April 17, 2025, Human Rights Watch wrote to the director of public prosecutions, the inspector general of police, the minister of health, the minister of information, communications technology and national guidance, and the executive director of the Uganda Communications Commission, to provide a summary of our research findings and to request information. The institutions contacted did not respond.

## Glossary

**Bisexual:** Sexual orientation of a person who is sexually and romantically attracted to both men and women.

**Cisgender:** Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

**Content Moderation:** Refers to the process of ensuring user-generated content upholds platform-specific guidelines and rules to establish the suitability of the content for publishing. It involves the screening of inappropriate content that users post on a platform. The process entails the application of pre-set rules for monitoring content. If it does not satisfy the guidelines, the content gets flagged and removed.

**‘Corrective’ rape:** A term used to describe a violent and unlawful act where individuals sexually assault someone to "correct" or "cure" them of their sexual orientation or gender identity, based on the incorrect belief that sexual violence can change or "normalize" someone's sexual preferences or gender identity.

**Digital Targeting:** Using digital media to select an individual or group as an object of an attack. In this report, digital targeting refers to the following tactics to target, and when done by state actors, to prosecute, LGBT people: entrapment on social media and dating applications, online extortion, and online harassment and outing.

**Doxxing:** Publishing personally identifiable information about an individual without their consent, sometimes with intent to provide access to them offline, exposing them to harassment, abuse, and possibly danger.

**Entrapment:** The action of tricking someone into committing a crime (under country-specific laws) to secure their prosecution. In this report, entrapment includes law enforcement’s impersonation of LGBT people on social media and dating applications to meet and arrest unsuspecting LGBT users on those applications based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Extortion:** The practice of obtaining something, especially money, through coercion, force, or threats.

**Gay:** Sexual orientation of a man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is toward other men.

**Gender:** Social and cultural codes (as opposed to biological sex) used to distinguish between what a society considers “masculine,” “feminine,” or “other” conduct.

**Gender Expression:** External characteristics and behaviors that societies define as “masculine,” “feminine,” or “other,” including features such as dress, appearance, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social behavior and interactions.

**Gender Identity:** A person’s internal, deeply felt sense of being female or male, both, or something other than female or male. It does not necessarily correspond to the biological sex assigned at birth.

**Gender Non-Conforming:** Behaving or appearing in ways that do not fully conform to social expectations based on one’s assigned sex.

**Hate speech:** Expression that is abusive, insulting, intimidating or harassing and/or which incites violence, hatred or discrimination against groups identified by a specific set of characteristics.

**Heterosexual:** Sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is toward people of another sex.

**Homophobia:** Fear of, contempt of, or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexuality.

**Homosexual:** Sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and romantic attractions are toward people of the same sex.

**Key Populations/Key Populations at Higher Risk of HIV Exposure:** Certain population groups are more likely to be exposed to certain diseases and less likely to have adequate



access to health care that can help prevent, diagnose, and treat such diseases because of complex and interrelated social, environmental, and economic conditions, including stigma, discrimination, and criminalization. With respect to HIV, in most of the settings addressed in this report, the key populations include men who have sex with men, transgender people, people who inject drugs, and sex workers and their clients.

**LGBT:** Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender; an inclusive term for groups and identities sometimes associated together as “sexual and gender minorities.”

**Lesbian:** Sexual orientation of a woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is toward other women.

**“Outing”:** The act of disclosing a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without that person’s consent.

**Sexual Orientation:** A person’s sexual and emotional attraction to people of the same gender, a different gender, or any gender.

**Queer:** An inclusive umbrella term covering multiple identities, sometimes used interchangeably with “LGBTQ.” Also used to describe divergence from heterosexual and cisgender norms without specifying new identity categories.

**Transgender (also “trans”):** Denotes or relates to people whose assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity - the gender that they are most comfortable with expressing or would express given a choice. A transgender person usually adopts, or would prefer to adopt, a gender expression in agreement with their gender identity, but they may or may not wish to permanently alter their bodily characteristics to conform to their preferred gender.

**Transgender women:** Persons designated male at birth but who identify and may present themselves as women. Transgender women usually prefer to be referred to with female pronouns.

**Transgender men:** Persons designated female at birth but who identify and may present themselves as men. Transgender men usually prefer to be referred to with male pronouns.

**Transphobia:** Fear of, contempt of, or discrimination against transgender people or transgenderism.

## Background

Since President Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986, his government has imposed severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association. These restrictions have been particularly harsh for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and those working to advance their rights. British colonial rulers criminalized same-sex conduct in Uganda 75 years ago, but Museveni's government has ramped up crackdowns and discrimination against LGBT people to unprecedented heights.

The government has kept in place the colonial legacy Penal Code Act enacted in 1950, section 145 of which punishes same-sex sexual acts between men and which prescribes a sentence of life imprisonment for violators.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, Parliament enacted the Penal Code Amendment (Gender References) Act, changing references in the Penal Code from "any male" to "any person," effectively expanding the criminalization of same-sex sexual acts from only men to include sexual acts between women.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, Museveni signed an amendment to the 1995 Constitution that expressly prohibits same-sex marriage.<sup>3</sup> The government has further introduced a raft of other legislation, detailed below, which expands the criminalization of same-sex conduct.

Several events in the last decade, culminating to the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, have led to increased violence against LGBT people in Uganda. Over several years, the Ugandan government, primarily led by the directorate of ethics and integrity under the office of the president, has censored discussions on LGBT rights in the media, raided pride events, and banned groups working on LGBT rights, often without a clear legal basis.<sup>4</sup> The courts have

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<sup>1</sup> Section 145, Penal Code Act 1950, cap 120, penalizes "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature" and any person that "permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature." Under the penal code a person convicted of these offences is liable to life imprisonment.  
[https://www.upf.go.ug/download/resources/Penal\\_Code\\_Act\\_1950.pdf](https://www.upf.go.ug/download/resources/Penal_Code_Act_1950.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, *A Quick Scan of the Laws and Policies Affecting the HIV Response Among Women who have Sex with Women in Uganda* (Kampala: HRAPF, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Uganda, 1995. Article 31(2)(a) states: "Marriage between persons of the same sex is prohibited."  
<https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2018-01-05>.

<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the Uganda Broadcasting Council fined Radio Simba over US \$1,000 and forced it to issue a public apology after hosting homosexuals on a live talk show. "Fine for Ugandan radio gay show", *BBC News*, 3 October 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3712266.stm> (accessed February 13, 2025). In 2012, the government banned 38 NGOs it accused of "promoting homosexuality" and "undermining the national culture," which were, according to the then minister of ethics and integrity, Simon Lokodo, "receiving support from abroad for Uganda's homosexuals and 'recruiting' young children into homosexuality." David Smith, "Ugandan minister shuts down gay rights conference", *Guardian*, February 15,

nevertheless often upheld these actions, such as in July 2014 when a high court judge ruled against four activists who had sued then ethics and integrity minister, Simon Lokodo, for shutting down a February 2012 workshop organized by an LGBT rights organization in Entebbe. The judge held that the workshop participants were "promoting" or "inciting" same-sex conduct by distributing condoms to gay and bisexual men.<sup>5</sup>

Ugandan media has a history of using sensationalist and homophobic coverage to incite fear and hatred toward LGBT people, often exposing individuals to public danger and reinforcing government-led homophobia. In 2011, a few months after a newspaper called for the "hanging of homosexuals," David Kato, a gay rights activist named in the publication, was bludgeoned to death.<sup>6</sup> In 2014, the tabloid *Red Pepper* exposed the names of people it called the "200 top homos."<sup>7</sup> Museveni and other government officials have frequently used the term "homosexual" in a derogatory manner, at times accusing political opposition members of being influenced or funded by so-called "foreign homosexuals."<sup>8</sup>

For years, police have subjected people detained on suspicion of homosexuality to forced abusive and invasive penile and anal exams involving digital penetration.<sup>9</sup> Such exams are a discredited and abusive practice of seeking "proof" of same-sex conduct that amount to torture.<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch and other groups have documented numerous cases of

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2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/15/ugandan-minister-gay-rights-conference> (accessed February 13, 2025). On August 4, 2016, Ugandan police unlawfully raided an event late in the evening of the third night of a week of Ugandan LGBTI Pride celebrations. The police locked the gates of the club, arrested more than 16 people – the majority of whom are Ugandan LGBT rights activists – and detained hundreds more for over 90 minutes, beating and humiliating people; taking pictures of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) Ugandans and threatening to publish them; and confiscating cameras. "Ugandan police raid LGBT fashion show", *Guardian*, August 5, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/05/uganda-police-raid-lgbt-gay-pride>, (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> "Uganda: Ruling Against LGBT Activists Violates Rights", Human Rights Watch news release, July 11, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/11/uganda-ruling-against-lgbt-activists-violates-rights>.

<sup>6</sup> Xan Rice, "Ugandan gay rights activist David Kato found murdered", *Guardian*, January 27, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/27/ugandan-gay-rights-activist-murdered>, (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Grace Matsiko, "Uganda newspaper names '200 top' homosexuals", *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 26, 2014, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/ugandan-newspaper-names-200-top-homosexuals-20140226-hvdsp.html>, (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Nico Schoonderwoerd, *Rigged: An investigation into Violence, Intimidation, Bribery, Ballot box stuffing and Fraud during the Ugandan 2021 elections*, (UVote, 2021), <https://uvote.nup-uganda.com/rigged/Rigged.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Josh Milton, "Dozens of queer Ugandans finally freed on bail after police 'witch hunt'", *PinkNews*, June 5, 2021, 1. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2021/06/05/uganda-44-lgbt-people-detained-shelter-bail-frank-mugisha/> (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> See for example the report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, January 5, 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/57, para 36; the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, A/HRC/16/47/Add.1, opinion no. 25/2009 (Egypt), paras. 24, 28-29, November 24, 2009; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual

police subjecting individuals to forced anal examinations for alleged violations of the Penal Code, and both the 2014 and 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Acts. Individuals subjected to a forced anal exam described it as physically painful, degrading and humiliating, and emotionally traumatic.<sup>11</sup>

## Restrictions on free expression, association, and assembly

Museveni's government has restricted the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly for activists and nongovernmental organizations, including LGBT rights groups.

In 2013, the government passed the Public Order Management Act (POMA), which grants police wide discretionary powers over the content and management of public meetings.<sup>12</sup> The law has largely been used to obstruct civic meetings and protests and as a basis to arrest government critics and rights activists.<sup>13</sup> In March 2020, the Constitutional Court nullified section 8 of the POMA, and in 2023 declared provisions of the same act that impose criminal sanctions for organizing public meetings without police permission unconstitutional.<sup>14</sup> Following these rulings, the police have resorted to using prohibitions against unlawful assembly and the “common nuisance” offence under the Penal Code to clamp down on activism.<sup>15</sup>

In November 2016, parliament passed the Non-Governmental Organisations Act, regulating the nongovernmental organization sector and establishing the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organisations (the NGO Bureau).<sup>16</sup> This law requires that nongovernmental

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orientation and gender identity,” May 4, 2015. A/HRC/29/23; ILO, OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UNWOMEN, WFP, WHO, and UNAIDS, “Ending Violence and Discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People,” September 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, Dignity Debase: Forced Anal Examinations in Homosexuality Prosecutions, 12, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> “Uganda public order bill is ‘blow to political debate’”, *BBC News Online*, August 6, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23587166> (accessed February 13, 2025). Public Order Management Act 9 of 2013, <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/2013/9/eng@2013-10-11> (accessed February 18, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> “Uganda: End Police Obstruction of Gatherings,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 19, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/19/uganda-end-police-obstruction-gatherings>

<sup>14</sup> *Uganda v Lule and 4 Others*, Constitutional Court of Uganda, Constitutional Reference No. 22 of 2020, Judgement, March 17, 2023, <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/judgment/ugcc/2023/98/eng@2023-03-17> (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Wilfred Kamusiime, “Police to continue using penal laws in the enforcement of unlawful assemblies, riots and other offences against public tranquility”, Uganda Police Force, March 20, 2023, <https://www.upf.go.ug/police-to-continue-using-penal-laws-in-the-enforcement-of-unlawful-assemblies-riots-and-other-offences-against-public-tranquility/> (accessed May 15, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Lizabeth Paulat, “Ugandan Parliament Passes Controversial NGO Bill”, *VOA News*, December 15, 2015, <https://www.voanews.com/a/uganda-ngo-bill/3104064.html> (accessed February 13, 2025).

organizations should “not engage in any act which is prejudicial to the interests of Uganda or the dignity of the people of Uganda.” Another provision criminalizes any activities by organizations that have not been issued with a permit by the NGO Bureau.<sup>17</sup>

The authorities have used these provisions to restrict the right to free association for LGBT rights groups. In 2024, Parliament approved a merger of the NGO Bureau with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, removing the NGO Bureau of its semi-independent status, and increasing the central government’s oversight over it.<sup>18</sup>

## 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act and other anti-LGBT legislation

On October 13, 2009, member of parliament David Bahati introduced to parliament the “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” which proposed to expand on the country’s then colonial-era criminalization of same-sex conduct. The bill, often referred to as the “Kill the Gays” bill because it initially proposed the death penalty for what it named as “aggravated homosexuality,” was eventually passed by parliament on December 17, 2013, and entered into force in February 2014, but did not include the death penalty.<sup>19</sup>

Like the Penal Code Act, the 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act imposed sentences of life imprisonment for same-sex conduct but differed in that it also increased punishment for repeat offenders, HIV-positive individuals who engaged in same-sex sexual activity, and for individuals who engaged in same-sex sexual activity with people under the age of 18, mandating a sentence of life imprisonment for them.<sup>20</sup> Under that law anyone who “promotes” homosexuality and any person who “aids, abets, counsels or procures another to engage in acts of homosexuality” would face fines, jail time, or both for their alleged actions.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Non-Governmental Organisations Act, Act 5 of 2016, <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/2016/5/eng%402016-03-03> (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> “NGOs warn of consequences of bureau mainstreaming”, *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.ug/ngos-warn-of-consequences-of-bureau-mainstreaming/> (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> “Uganda: ‘Anti-Homosexuality’ Bill Threatens Liberties and Human Rights Defenders” Human Rights Watch news release, October 15, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/15/uganda-anti-homosexuality-bill-threatens-liberties-and-human-rights-defenders>.

<sup>20</sup> Section 3, Anti-Homosexuality Act, Act 4 of 2014, <https://commons.laws.africa/akn/ug/act/2014/4/media/publication/ug-act-2014-4-publication-document.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Section 13, “Promotion of Homosexuality.”

Within five months of the passing of this law, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented how LGBT people faced a notable increase in arbitrary arrests, police abuse and extortion, loss of employment, and evictions and homelessness. Scores fled the country to escape the increasingly hostile environment.<sup>22</sup> On August 1, 2014, the constitutional court overturned the law on procedural rather than substantive grounds, ruling it unconstitutional because the lack of quorum in parliament on the day of the vote violated the legislative process.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after the Constitutional Court ruling, proponents of the 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act, including Bahati, promised to reintroduce the law.<sup>24</sup>

## Reintroduction of Anti-LGBT Legislation

After the Constitutional Court's quashing of the 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act, crackdowns and attacks by government officials and unidentified people persisted against people perceived as being LGBT, often without accountability, as described below.

The authorities arbitrarily arrested hundreds of people including LGBT activists based on their perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or LGBT rights activism, raided homeless shelters for LGBT people, blocked pride events, and failed to hold to account people responsible for attacks against LGBT people.<sup>25</sup> These abuses escalated during Uganda's Covid-19 lockdown, as the authorities used the pandemic as a pretext to crack down on LGBT people.<sup>26</sup>

In 2021, Parliament approved the Sexual Offences Bill, which criminalized sexual acts between persons of the same gender, as well as anal sex between people of any gender,

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<sup>22</sup> "Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act's Heavy Toll, Human Rights Watch news release, May 14, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/14/uganda-anti-homosexuality-acts-heavy-toll>.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Burnett, "Victory in Uganda, but more work ahead", commentary, Human Rights Watch Dispatch, August 1, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/01/victory-uganda-more-work-ahead>.

<sup>24</sup> Abby Ohlhesier, "Ugandan lawmakers promise to revive their anti-gay law, just days after the country's constitutional court struck it down", *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/08/05/ugandan-lawmakers-promise-to-revive-their-anti-gay-law-just-days-after-the-countrys-constitutional-court-struck-it-down/> (accessed February 14, 2025).

<sup>25</sup> "Uganda: Stop Police Harassment of LGBT People", Human Rights Watch news release, November 17, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/17/uganda-stop-police-harassment-lgbt-people>.

<sup>26</sup> "Uganda: Drop Charges Against 19 Homeless Youth", Human Rights Watch new release, May 11, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/11/uganda-drop-charges-against-19-homeless-youth>.

with a penalty of up to 10 years in prison.<sup>27</sup> However, on August 3, 2021, President Museveni rejected this bill and returned it to parliament, stating that it covered offenses already provided by the Penal Code.<sup>28</sup>

In late February 2023, parliament granted leave to parliamentarian Asuman Basalirwa to introduce a revised and even more egregious version of the previously struck down 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act.<sup>29</sup> On March 21, 2023, parliament passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act, discussed below.<sup>30</sup> Two months later, on May 26, President Museveni signed the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act into law.<sup>31</sup>

## 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act

The 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act confirms the penal code's mandatory punishment of life imprisonment for same-sex conduct and increases to 10 years the maximum prison sentence for an attempt at same-sex conduct.<sup>32</sup> The most egregious provision - section 3 on "aggravated homosexuality" calls for the death penalty in certain circumstances, such as for "serial offenders," or for anyone having same-sex sexual relations with a person with a disability, a child, or a person of "advanced age," which the Act defines as someone 75 or older.

The Act also outlaws the "promotion of homosexuality," effectively instituting a system of censorship on public discussion of LGBT issues, and on LGBT rights advocacy. Under section 11, any person advocating for the rights of LGBT people, or providing financial support to organizations that do so, could face up to 20 years' imprisonment. LGBT rights groups could also be deemed unable to operate legally. In addition, anyone who

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<sup>27</sup> "Uganda: Reject Sexual Offenses Bill", Human Rights Watch news release, May 6, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/06/uganda-reject-sexual-offenses-bill>.

<sup>28</sup> "Museveni rejects new law on sexual offenses", Parliament Watch, August 11, 2021, <https://parliamentwatch.ug/news-amp-updates/museveni-rejects-new-law-on-sexual-offences/> (accessed February 14, 2025).

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Arnold Wadero, "Lawmakers welcome fresh anti-homosexuality Bill", *Daily Monitor*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/lawmakers-welcome-fresh-anti-homosexuality-bill-4141958>, (accessed February 14, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> Oryem Nyeko, "Ugandan Parliament Passes Extreme Anti-LGBT Law", commentary, Human Rights Dispatch, March 23, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/22/ugandan-parliament-passes-extreme-anti-lgbt-bill>.

<sup>31</sup> Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz, "Uganda's President Sign Repressive Anti-LGBT law", commentary, Human Rights Dispatch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/30/ugandas-president-signs-repressive-anti-lgbt-law>.

<sup>32</sup> Uganda Law Information Institute, "Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023, Act 6 of 2023," <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/2023/6/eng@2023-05-30>.



“advertises, publishes, prints, broadcasts, [or] distributes” material, including digitally, that is regarded by authorities as “promoting or encouraging homosexuality” faces criminal sanctions. If anyone conducts a same-sex marriage ceremony, they could be imprisoned for up to 10 years.<sup>33</sup>

The Act also requires everyone convicted of prohibited same-sex activities to disclose such a conviction to all potential employers.<sup>34</sup> This disclosure requirement is harmful to the human rights to employment without discrimination and an adequate standard of living. However, lesbian women face unique employment-related burdens under the Act, which also explicitly disqualifies those convicted of homosexuality from working with children and vulnerable persons, both of which are traditionally women-led fields in Uganda such as care giving, health, and education.

On April 3, 2024, the Constitutional Court upheld most provisions of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, after a cross-section of human rights activists challenged the law on the grounds that it violates fundamental rights guaranteed in Uganda’s constitution. The judges ruled that the act does not violate fundamental rights to equality and nondiscrimination, privacy, freedom of expression, or the right to work for LGBT people.

The court did, however, strike down the sections that restricted healthcare access for LGBT people, criminalized renting premises to LGBT people, and created an obligation to report alleged acts of homosexuality.<sup>35</sup> The judges also ruled that those who had challenged the law had failed to prove a lack of public participation in the legislative processes or breaches of parliamentary rules of procedures. They said that the law had been “overwhelmingly passed on the basis of those views of the Ugandan people’s parliamentary representatives, who would know the sentiments of the people that they represent on the subject.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Oryem Nyeko, “Ugandan Parliament Passes Extreme Anti-LGBT Law”, commentary, Human Rights Dispatch, March 23, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/22/ugandan-parliament-passes-extreme-anti-lgbt-bill>.

<sup>34</sup> Section 10.

<sup>35</sup> Uganda: Court Upholds Anti-Homosexuality Act”, Human Rights Watch news release, April 4, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/04/uganda-court-upholds-anti-homosexuality-act>.

<sup>36</sup> Hon. Fox Odoi & 21 Others v Attorney General & 3 Others (Consolidated Constitutional Petition 14 of 2023; Consolidated Constitutional Petition 15 of 2023; Consolidated Constitutional Petition 16 of 2023; Consolidated Constitutional Petition 85 of 2023) [2024] UGCC 10 (3 April 2024), <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/judgment/ugcc/2024/10/eng@2024-04-03>.

### *Influence of Conservative “Family Life” Groups*

Despite the constitutional court’s proclamation that the law reflects the sentiments of Ugandan voters, numerous foreign conservative groups, including evangelical Christian groups, from the United States in particular, have also been instrumental in shaping Uganda’s anti-LGBT legislation and policy (see Annex). Working with similarly aligned anti-LGBT activists in Uganda, they have helped to influence both public opinion and political decisions through various channels and participating in or organizing anti-LGBT conferences, and in some cases contributing to the drafts of proposed anti-LGBT legislation.

For example in March 2009, the Family Life Network, a Ugandan registered nongovernmental organization, hosted a three-day conference in Kampala titled the “Seminar on Exposing the Homosexuals’ Agenda,” with speakers from Uganda and the United States, and on March 5, speakers from the event, including the Family Life Network’s Stephen Langa, and American anti-gay evangelist campaigner Scott Lively met with members of Uganda’s Parliament to discuss the then pending Anti-Homosexuality Bill.<sup>37</sup> Over the years, the Family Life Network continued to be involved in anti-gay advocacy in Uganda, including by organizing press conferences which included presentations by “ex-gay” campaigners who said they had been “recruited” into homosexuality.<sup>38</sup>

In April 2023, weeks after parliament passed the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill, an inter-parliamentary conference on “family values and sovereignty” was held in Kampala, with US-based organization, Family Watch International, that describes itself as an “international education organization” that “support(s) and promote(s) natural marriage between one man and one woman,” helping to shape the program and providing three

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<sup>37</sup> NPR, “US Evangelical Leaders Blamed for Uganda Anti-Gay Sentiment,” audio report, December 18, 2009 <https://www.npr.org/2009/12/18/121605529/u-s-evangelical-leaders-blamed-for-uganda-anti-gay-sentiment> (accessed May 12, 2025); Uganda Parliament Hansard, March 04, 2009, <https://cmis.parliament.go.ug/cmisis/views/7b30f4ab-7fae-4ebe-8213-e16c8c265d37%253B1.0> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>38</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Extremist Files: Scott Lively*, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/scott-lively/> (accessed February 14, 2025).

speakers.<sup>39</sup> Representatives of Family Watch International also held “impromptu meetings” with President Museveni and First Lady Janet Museveni during the conference.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Emma Sanderson, “The Unholy Relationship Between Uganda’s Anti-LGBTQ+ Law and US Evangelicalism”, *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, June 8, 2023, <https://globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/unholy-relationship-between-ugandas-anti-lgbtq-law-and-us> (accessed February 14, 2025) ; Family Watch International, “Frequently Asked Questions on the Situation in Uganda and Family Watch International”, undated, <https://familywatch.org/frequently-asked-questions-on-the-situation-in-uganda-and-family-watch-international/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>40</sup> Family Watch International, “Frequently Asked Questions on the Situation in Uganda and Family Watch International”, undated, <https://familywatch.org/frequently-asked-questions-on-the-situation-in-uganda-and-family-watch-international/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

# Hate Speech around the Passing of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act

In 2021 after President Museveni returned the Sexual Offences Bill to parliament, two years followed of unprecedented, largely negative and sensationalist media coverage of LGBT people and issues, as well as hostile and anti-LGBT rhetoric by high profile figures in Ugandan politics and government, leading eventually to the introduction of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill. While anti-LGBT sentiment by public figures had been commonplace before in Uganda, it became heightened in the months leading up to the eventual passing of the bill by parliament, with examples as documented below.

## Anti-LGBT Rhetoric by Religious and Government Figures

Human Rights Watch analyzed speeches and media reporting of public remarks by President Museveni, other high profile government figures, and religious leaders in the months leading up to the introduction of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill. These figures made homophobic remarks, falsely equated homosexuality with child abuse, and promoted discrimination against LGBT individuals and organizations advocating for their rights.

### *Rhetoric by Religious Figures*

On December 14, 2022, Archbishop Stephen Kaziimba told youth in Mukono to avoid “bad groups” that may “lure them into gay activities” during a speech made at an annual provincial youth convention held at Mukono High School. Kaziimba further warned churches against receiving money from unclear sources, claiming recipients of such funding are compelled to “sponsor same-sex marriages” by the donors.<sup>41</sup>

On January 26, 2023, Bishop Joshua Lwere, the general overseer of the National Fellowship of Born-Again Pentecostal Churches of Uganda (NFBPC-U), an umbrella network of Pentecostal churches, para- church organizations and missionary organizations, said he

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<sup>41</sup> Diphaz Kiguli, “Archbishop Kaziimba warns youth against homosexuality”, *Monitor*, December 14, 2022, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/archbishop-kaziimba-warns-youth-against-homosexuality-4054920> (accessed February 17, 2025).

would “fight all forms of homosexuality” during the organization’s extra ordinary annual general meeting held in Kampala.<sup>42</sup>

The next month, on February 16, representatives of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, an interfaith coalition of major religious organizations across the country, said during a press briefing at their headquarters in Kampala that they would do “everything possible” to return an anti-homosexuality bill to parliament.<sup>43</sup> On February 24, media reported that the Bishop of West Ankole Diocese Johnson Twinomujuni said surging populations in boarding schools may exacerbate homosexuality among students, referring to homosexuality as a danger to be prevented or avoided.<sup>44</sup> During this time, thousands of people participated in what media called a “Muslims against homosexuality” protest march in Jinja on February 26.<sup>45</sup>

### *Rhetoric by Government Officials, Media Framing and Misinformation*

On November 6, 2022, during the 42nd session of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)—EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique, Thomas Tayebwa, the deputy speaker of parliament, declared that Uganda would not accept laws “promoting homosexuality.”<sup>46</sup> Tayebwa further claimed that an agreement between the European Union and the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States had “hidden clauses” designed to promote homosexuality.<sup>47</sup> A few weeks later, on November 30, during the National Parliamentary Conference on Ethics and Morality in

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<sup>42</sup> Pastor Richard Magongo, “Pentecostal churches join the fight against homosexuality”, *Monitor*, January 26, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/commentary/pentecostal-churches-join-the-fight-against-homosexuality-4099630> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>43</sup> Dorothy Nagitta & Peter Sserugo, “Religious leaders to return anti-gay Bill to Parliament”, *Monitor*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/religious-leaders-to-return-anti-gay-bill-to-parliament-4125868> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>44</sup> Zadock Amanyisa, “Surging population in boarding schools breeding ground for homosexuality- cleric”, *Monitor*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/-surging-population-in-boarding-schools-breeding-ground-for-homosexuality-cleric-4136638> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>45</sup> Tausi Nakato, “Muslims march against homosexuality”, *Monitor*, February 26, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/muslims-march-against-homosexuality-4137716> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>46</sup> “Uganda Deputy Speaker Tayebwa says country won't accept laws promoting Homosexuality, abortion”, video clip, YouTube, [https://youtu.be/AIE\\_y6ewkp4?si=nqt2MEsUIRgqN-Fj](https://youtu.be/AIE_y6ewkp4?si=nqt2MEsUIRgqN-Fj) (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Itai, “Uganda lawmaker: International agreement has ‘hidden clauses’ to promote homosexuality”, *Washington Blade*, November 17, 2022, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2022/11/17/uganda-lawmaker-international-agreement-has-hidden-clauses-to-promote-homosexuality/> (accessed February 17, 2025); “NATIONAL IDENTITY: Tayebwa vows to oppose homosexuality”, video clip, YouTube <https://youtu.be/ZhhzqYfZJxs?si=YiGQ1U15OMZop8ro> (accessed February 17, 2025).

Kampala, Tayebwa asked the government to fund all religious institutions across Uganda as a way of “fighting homosexuality.”<sup>48</sup>

During this period Tayebwa also harassed LGBT rights groups with hostile rhetoric and threats of deregistration. On January 25, during a parliamentary sitting, he urged the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which oversees the police, to investigate the activities of the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), an advocacy and legal aid group that promotes LGBT and sex-worker rights. Tayebwa alleged falsely that HRAPF had facilitated the passing of a Kasese district bylaw that “recognizes homosexuals and transgender people as minorities.”

HRAPF had employed a consultant to work with the district’s council, the legislative arm of the Kasese local government, to develop “a by-law [that] would be one way to re-enforce the right of all Ugandans, including key populations, to freely access health services, including those related to HIV and TB,” in keeping with Uganda’s own health policies to combat HIV/AIDS.<sup>49</sup> Local media, including Uganda’s largest private newspaper, reporting on this mistitled the bylaw a “same-sex bylaw” and a “homosexuality law.”<sup>50</sup>

On December 21, 2022, Annette Kezaabu, the Pornography Control Committee chairperson at the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity, a government institution under the office of the president, appeared to falsely equate LGBT persons and LGBT groups with predators who abuse children, claiming that schools are now the “prime target for LGBT communities.”<sup>51</sup>

On February 5, 2023, Major General Francis Takirwa, the deputy commander of land forces in the Ugandan military, used the handover of a renovated community health facility in

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<sup>48</sup> Damali Mukhaye, “Homosexuality: Tayebwa asks govt to fund religious institutions”, *Monitor*, November 30, 2022, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/homosexuality-tayebwa-asks-govt-to-fund-religious-institutions-4038322> (accessed (February 17, 2025)).

<sup>49</sup> “Clarification on the issues raised by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament concerning HRAPF’s contribution to a proposed by-law for improving access to HIV and TB services in Kasese”, HRAPF press release, January 27, 2023, <https://hrapf.org/storage/2023/01/23-01-27-HRAPF-Statement-on-the-Kasese-by-law-process-Final.pdf> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>50</sup> “Parliament red flags Kasese’s same-sex by-law”, *Monitor*, January 26, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/parliament-red-flags-kasese-s-same-sex-by-law-4099788> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> Mike Sebalu, “Pornography control committee warns schools about increasing homosexuality”, *Kfm*, December 21, 2022, <https://www.kfm.co.ug/pornography-control-committee-warns-schools-about-increasing-homosexuality/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

Mbarara to call for excluding gay people from receiving health services, saying, “Don’t use our health facilities to treat homosexuals.”<sup>52</sup>

On February 20, the National Curriculum Development Centre, the government institution responsible for developing school curricula, directed schools to ensure prior approval of all reading materials, including donations, to guard against materials that “promote homosexuality.”<sup>53</sup>

On February 24, the state minister for sports, Peter Ogwang, called for the introduction of the death penalty for same-sex conduct.<sup>54</sup>

On the same day, President Museveni reaffirmed his stance against homosexuality during remarks at the national celebrations of Janani Luwum Day, a public holiday, commemorating the death of the former archbishop of the Church of Uganda in Kitgum district, telling the audience, “I want to congratulate the Ugandan [Christian] believers in rejecting homosexuality. There is an issue with these Europeans, they don’t listen. We have been telling them, please, thing of homosexuality is not something we should normalize and celebrate. They want to turn the abnormal into normal, and impose it on others.”<sup>55</sup> Museveni’s remarks conveniently ignore that it was British colonial authorities who introduced the criminal prohibition on same-sex conduct into Ugandan law. The next day, Chris Obore, the director of communications and public affairs at parliament, announced parliamentarians were calling for a new anti-gay bill to be tabled before the House.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Rajab Mukombozi, “Don’t treat homosexuals in our facilities, says Maj Gen Takirwa”, *Monitor*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/don-t-treat-homosexuals-in-our-facilities-says-maj-gen-takirwa-4114502> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>53</sup> Jane Nafula, “Homosexuality: Govt warns of unapproved school materials”, *Monitor*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/homosexuality-govt-warns-of-unapproved-school-materials-4129950> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> “Uganda: New Anti-Gay Bill Further Threatens Rights”, Human Rights Watch news release, March 9, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/09/uganda-new-anti-gay-bill-further-threatens-rights>.

<sup>55</sup> Tobbias Jolly Owiny, “Museveni: Uganda won’t support homosexuality”, *Monitor*, February 17, 2023 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-uganda-won-t-support-homosexuality--4127004> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Kamurungi, “Legislators back call for new anti - gay Bill”, *Monitor*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/legislators-back-call-for-new-anti-gay-bill-4126984> (accessed February 17, 2025).

During this period, in early March, local media reported the arrest of a female teacher at Parvatiben Muljibhani Madhvani Girls School (PMM) Girls' School in Jinja, and protests by parents of students at the school, for what was termed “promoting homosexuality”, “lesbianism”, “sodomy” and “recruiting young girls into homo activities.”<sup>57</sup> The teacher was charged with gross indecency, a charge used to criminalize sexual activity between men or between women, and of “procurement of gross indecency,” defined as being to “procure another person by threats or intimidation to do an unlawful sexual act.”<sup>58</sup>

Museveni made other inflammatory remarks during the period in which the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was under consideration by parliament. On March 17, he described gay people as “deviants” in a state of the nation address before parliament and called for an investigation into homosexuality only days before parliamentarians prepared to vote on the bill.<sup>59</sup> On April 2, he called on African nations to reject the “promotion of homosexuality,” describing it as a “big threat” and “danger to the procreation of human race.”<sup>60</sup>

## Parliamentary Discourse During the Tabling of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill

On February 28, 2023, speaker of parliament, Anita Among, granted parliamentarian Asuman Basalirwa leave to introduce the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill,<sup>61</sup> and on March 21, parliament already passed the bill, parliament’s committee on legal and parliamentary

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<sup>57</sup> Tausi Nakato, “Parents storm school over suspected lesbian teacher”, *Monitor*, March 4, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/parents-storm-school-over-suspected-lesbian-teacher-4145828> (accessed February 17, 2025); Pamela Achom, “How Jinja female teacher was busted for recruiting young girls into homo activities”, March 6, 2023, <https://www.galaxyfm.co.ug/2023/03/06/how-jinja-female-teacher-was-busted-for-recruiting-young-girls-into-homo-activities/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> Tausi Nakato, “Suspected lesbians to spend week in prison”, *Monitor*, March 9, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/suspected-lesbians-to-spend-week-in-prison-4151902> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> “Uganda: Museveni calls gay people ‘deviants’ as anti-LGBT bill advances”, *Africa News*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/03/16/uganda-museveni-calls-gay-people-deviants-as-anti-lgbt-bill-advances/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>60</sup> Blessing Jean Nyamate, “Museveni Rallies African MPs Against Homosexuality, Vows to Block Sex Education”, *Chimp Reports*, April 2, 2023, <https://chimpreports.com/museveni-rallies-african-mps-against-homosexuality-vows-to-block-sex-education/> (accessed February 17, 2025); Alice McCool, “Ugandan president calls on Africa to ‘save the world from homosexuality’”, April 3, 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/apr/03/ugandan-president-calls-on-africa-to-save-the-world-from-homosexuality> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>61</sup> Ochola O. Dominic, “Parliament Grants Basalirwa Leave to Introduce Anti-Homosexuality Bill”, *Uganda Radio Network*, February 28, 2023, <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/parliament-grants-basalirwa-leave-to-introduce-anti-homosexuality-bill> (accessed February 17, 2025).



affairs allowed only six days for the public to submit opinions on the bill,<sup>62</sup> and parliamentary debate on the law was similarly brief, lasting only one day.<sup>63</sup> On May 26, President Museveni signed the Act into law.<sup>64</sup>

In debates around the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, aired live on television and streamed on parliament's web site, parliamentarians used virulently homophobic rhetoric. The widespread coverage in local media exposed Ugandans to the anti-LGBT rhetoric used in parliament.

### *March 7*

During the first introduction of the bill to parliament on March 7, speaker Among described it as part of a “moral and cultural fight ... and a fight to protect our sovereignty and families.”<sup>65</sup> She further promised that the Bill would be passed, “at whatever cost.”<sup>66</sup> She objected to delays caused by the Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development ‘s late financial certification of the bill, by falsely conflated the criminalization of same sex acts with protecting children from abuse, saying: “We are talking about issues of life and death. Our children are being sodomised at school. Assuming it is your kid to whom such is being done?”<sup>67</sup>

### *March 9, First Reading in Parliament*

On March 9, the Anti-Homosexuality Bill had its first reading in parliament.

Speaker Among made several statements announcing that parliamentarians would use an open ballot and suggested that anyone voting against it was gay, saying: “This is the time you are going to show us whether you are a homosexual or not.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Sam Waswa, “Gays Invited to Parliament to Debate Anti-Homosexuality Bill,” *Chimp Reports*, March 9, 2023, <https://chimpreports.com/gays-invited-to-parliament-to-debate-anti-homosexuality-bill/> (accessed May 15, 2025)

<sup>63</sup> Oryem Nyeko, “Ugandan Parliament Passes Extreme Anti-LGBT Bill,” *Human Rights Dispatch*, March 22, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/22/ugandan-parliament-passes-extreme-anti-lgbt-bill>.

<sup>64</sup> Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz, “Uganda’s President Signs Repressive Anti-LGBT Law,” *Human Rights Dispatch*, May 30, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/30/ugandas-president-signs-repressive-anti-lgbt-law>.

<sup>65</sup> Official report of the proceedings of parliament, 7 March, 2023, p. 7357.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7358.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7359.

<sup>68</sup> Official report of the proceedings of parliament, March 9, 2023, p. 7415.

Among also said that “the homosexuals” would also be able to give their views on the Anti-Homosexuality Bill to the committee, saying “we want them to be heard, even in their illegality and immorality.”<sup>69</sup> However, lawmakers gave the public only one week, an inadequate amount of time, to submit their views to parliament on the proposed law.<sup>70</sup>

### *March 21, One Day of Debate, and Adoption*

The Committee on Legal and Parliamentary Affairs approved the proposed bill, and on March 21, presented a majority report in support of the bill, and a minority report presented by two parliamentarians who opposed the bill.

The majority report concluded that legislation was necessary to strengthen offences relating to homosexuality and ultimately recommended that the bill be passed into law.<sup>71</sup> The minority report argued that the proposed law “introduces nothing of practical value”, that its clauses were unconstitutional, infringing on rights to privacy, and freedoms from inhuman and degrading treatment, freedom from discrimination, and expression, and that it would “reverse gains registered in the fight against gender-based violence.”<sup>72</sup>

Human Rights Watch reviewed the handsard of this parliamentary session, noting that while the majority presentation was not interrupted, members of parliament, including Speaker Among, interrupted the presentation of the minority report four times.

Following the minority report presentation, Among again suggested that anyone opposing the bill was gay, saying that Parliamentarians opposed to the bill would be given a chance to speak first “then we will know who is who.”<sup>73</sup>

Following this, Among called on parliamentarians “who are saying, ‘we do not want homosexuality’” to speak. During this session, parliamentarian Geoffrey Macho, engaged in verbal sexual harassment of one of the bill’s opponents:

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7 417.

<sup>70</sup> Sam Waswa, “Gays Invited to Parliament to Debate Anti-Homosexuality Bill”, *Chimp Reports*, March 9, 2023, <https://chimpreports.com/gays-invited-to-parliament-to-debate-anti-homosexuality-bill/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>71</sup> Official report of the proceedings of parliament, March 21, 2023, p. 7621.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7626.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7627.

I rise on a point of procedure, that we proceed very well since we have a very capable doctor here at Parliament to go and examine Hon. Fox Odoi – whether he is bisexual, so that we discuss knowing the agenda of Hon. Fox Odoi ... I do not know whether we are proceeding well without knowing the gender of Hon. Fox Odoi because he said that police sometimes arrest people because of appearance. Hon Fox Odoi might be having a beard but when he is a woman or bisexual.<sup>74</sup>

During the debate, several parliamentarians likened homosexuality to crimes like theft and murder, and conflated it with children being molested while offering no evidence of these false claims.<sup>75</sup>

Lillian Aber, a representative for Kitgum district for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, said: “It is a pain when you watch videos of how our children are being molested in schools today. There are people in this country who are being given money to advocate for this ... we would like to stand firm and say that we will not allow this vice to penetrate our community.”<sup>76</sup> Musa Ecweru claimed he had seen children with “ripped anuses” he alleged were “molested by homosexuals.”<sup>77</sup>

Other parliamentarians also made inflammatory and homophobic remarks, including falsely claiming that homosexuality is a learned:

“This Parliament should take a decision that those caught practicing homosexuality should be killed.”<sup>78</sup>

— Noah Mutebi, NRM Nakasongola County Member of Parliament

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<sup>74</sup> Official report of the proceedings of parliament, March 21, 2023, p. 7635.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7637.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7638.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7639.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7640.

“We have now known homosexuality is not inborn, but learned. A teacher who teaches homosexuality – the doctrine – is actually the source of the problems that we are talking about.”<sup>79</sup>

— David Bahati, NRM Ndurwa County West Member of Parliament, on a provision related to the promotion of homosexuality in the bill

“I propose that these NGOS and the bodies that promote homosexuality be banned.”<sup>80</sup>

— Jennifer Ayoo, NRM Kalaki District Woman Representative

In proposing that a proposed clause of the law mitigating punishment due to so-called “genetic abnormalities” be removed, Chris Baryomunsi, the minister for information and communications technology and national guidance claimed that “the body of evidence shows that homosexual behaviour is a deviant behaviour ... which is learnt and can be unlearnt.”<sup>81</sup>

Parliament eventually passed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill by majority on March 21, 2023.<sup>82</sup> President Museveni signed it into law on May 26, 2023.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7660.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7661.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7678.

<sup>82</sup> Oryem Nyeko, “Uganda Parliament Passes Extreme Anti-LGBT Bill”, Human Rights Dispatch, March 22, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/22/ugandan-parliament-passes-extreme-anti-lgbt-bill>.

<sup>83</sup> Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz, “Uganda’s President Signs Repressive Anti-LGBT Law,” Human Rights Dispatch, May 30, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/30/ugandas-president-signs-repressive-anti-lgbt-law>.

## More Attacks around the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act

Before the bill was tabled [in February 2023], you would receive calls once in a while, where someone would say, ‘We know what you are doing.’ Those ones who would love to blackmail you. But I [never gave] them my time... But when they started tabling the bill, that is when these calls started becoming a lot. Where people would keep on calling you [saying], ‘We know where you stay. We know what you do.’

— Daniel, LGBT rights activist, Kampala, May 17, 2023.<sup>84</sup>

Human Rights Watch found that homophobic rhetoric by public figures surrounding parliament’s passing of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act not only shaped negative discourse about LGBT people in Uganda, but correlated with an emboldening of the attacks and harassment against LGBT people as well as independent organizations perceived as supportive of LGBT rights. Authorities raided rights organizations, entrapped LGBT people through social media and dating apps, arbitrarily detained LGBT people and their allies, and sometimes extorted money from LGBT people in exchange for releasing them from police custody. The authorities also failed to hold to account individuals responsible for physical and sexual violence, and online harassment against LGBT people.

Many of the people Human Rights Watch interviewed for this report said that while violence targeting LGBT people and anti-LGBT rhetoric existed before the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill was introduced, the hostility intensified during its adoption and since.

DefendDefenders, a Kampala-based organization that supports human rights defenders, said that within just 24 hours of parliament passing the law, they identified eight cases of physical and sexual violence, including cases of rape by men of people they presumed to be gay in order to “convert” them to heterosexuality. The attacks were reportedly carried out by unidentified individuals in the areas where the victims lived.<sup>85</sup> “The number of

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<sup>84</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Daniel, May 17, 2023.

<sup>85</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mary (not their real name), Kampala, March 28, 2023.

requests [for assistance from the organization] is overwhelming,” a representative of the organization told Human Rights Watch.<sup>86</sup>

While direct causation between the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the reported violence is challenging to prove, other groups described similar findings. The Strategic Response Team, a coalition of Ugandan LGBT rights organizations, documented 70 cases of physical violence against LGBT individuals between January and August 2023, coinciding with the introduction and passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.<sup>87</sup> According to the coalition, LGBT people in Uganda experienced “intensified violence and discrimination” during this period, including beatings, sexual and psychological violence, evictions, blackmail, loss of employment, and denial of access to healthcare on the basis of their perceived or real sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>88</sup>

Separately, the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), the Kampala-based legal aid organization, recorded an increase in the number of violations against LGBT people in Uganda reported to their group during the two months after parliament’s passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act on March 21, 2023, and President Museveni signing the bill into law on May 26, compared to the same period in 2022. The group reported receiving and handling cases affecting 159 LGBTIQ individuals during this period in 2023, compared to 40 for the same period in 2022. These cases included acts of violence and threats of violence, evictions, sexual violence, and arrests, against people specifically because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>89</sup>

HRAPF also reported in July 2024 that 667 of the cases handled across its legal aid network in the 14 months from June 2023 to July 2024 inclusive, involved human rights violations

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> “Strategic Response Team Report On Human Rights Violations Towards LGBTIQ+ Persons Since The Passing Of The Anti Homosexuality Act, 2023”, *Kuchu Times*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.kuchutimes.com/2023/09/strategic-response-team-report-on-human-rights-violations-towards-lgbtiq-persons-since-the-passing-of-the-anti-homosexuality-act-2023/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>88</sup> “Strategic Response Team Report On Human Rights Violations Towards LGBTIQ+ Persons Since The Passing Of The Anti Homosexuality Act, 2023”, *Kuchu Times*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.kuchutimes.com/2023/09/strategic-response-team-report-on-human-rights-violations-towards-lgbtiq-persons-since-the-passing-of-the-anti-homosexuality-act-2023/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights and Protection Forum, *Increasing Violence: Cases Of Violence And Violations Against Real or Suspected LGBTIQ Persons For The Period Between The Passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2023 (21st March 2023) And Its Coming Into Force (30th May 2023)*, Kampala, 19th June 2023. <https://hrapf.org/?mdocs-file=11300&mdocs-url=false>.

affecting 850 LGBTIQ persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. These included evictions, violence, arrests, and other forms of discrimination.<sup>90</sup>

## Physical Attacks on LGBT People

In the weeks before and the months after the passage of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, many individuals reported facing a range of physical attacks, because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or their LGBT rights activism. Whether these attacks would have happened whether or not the Anti-Homosexuality Act was being debated and adopted is impossible to establish, but the fact is that they did occur at a time when anti-LGBT rhetoric from politicians, other leaders, and in the media was particularly virulent and violent.

Derrick Kimera, the founder and executive director of Let's Walk Uganda, an organization which provides shelter services to LGBTQ people experiencing homelessness, described an incident mid-March 2023, days before the Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed.

Kimera recounted that a woman called him around 1 a.m., claiming to be a lesbian woman in urgent need of help from his organization. Kimera and one of his shelter occupants went to the location the woman directed them to, where they found a group of more than seven people severely beating a man. Realizing that this was a trap, Kimera drove his car away. He said that people started throwing stones at his vehicle, breaking the windows and shouting, “another gay is here,” “another gay is running.” The following day, Kimera said he learned that the person he saw being beaten worked at another LGBT rights organization.<sup>91</sup>

Separately, on April 17, 2023, a group of men approached Florence a transgender woman, as she returned from attending a court hearing, she said. The men approached her when she got out of a taxi and started beating her, saying she looks like a woman and may be “a homosexual,” Florence told Human Rights Watch. As a result of the physical violence she experienced, she said she was admitted to a hospital where she stayed for almost a week.

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<sup>90</sup> Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, “Report on violence and violations based on real or presumed sexual orientation or gender identity during the month of July 2024”, published August 12, 2024, available at <https://hrapf.org/violation-reports/>.

<sup>91</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Derrick Kimera, April 14, 2023.

She said she reported the matter to the police, but they took no discernable action that she was aware of.<sup>92</sup>

Media reported that on January 3, 2024, two attackers on a motorcycle stabbed Stephen Kabuye, the executive director of the advocacy group Colored Voice Truth to LGBTQ, in the right arm and stomach.<sup>93</sup> Kabuye, who is a well-known activist, said that he believes the attackers had targeted him because of his public LGBT rights activism.<sup>94</sup> A police spokesperson told the media that the police were investigating the case.<sup>95</sup>

## Attacks on Rights Groups

In the lead up to and in the aftermath of the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, the Ugandan authorities, primarily the NGO Bureau and police, led a crackdown against LGBT rights groups, shutting down organizations that provide vital legal, and sexual and mental health services, arresting and detaining their staff and, in some cases, seizing equipment and soliciting bribes from their staff.

The government has, without evidence, accused these groups of participating in “recruiting” people, mostly children, into “acts of homosexuality,” and of producing pornographic content, as well as harassing people attempting to register their organizations, as described in the cases documented below.

The interviews Human Rights Watch conducted indicate that these actions have had a devastating impact on the rights of people the organizations support and their staff.

## *Sexual Minorities Uganda*

On August 5, 2022, the NGO Bureau announced that it had “halted the activities” of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), Uganda’s most prominent LGBTQ rights organization, for not

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<sup>92</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Florence, May 8, 2023.

<sup>93</sup> Harajah Nalwaada, “Uganda gay activist blames knife attack on a worsening climate of intolerance”, *Associated Press*, January 4, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/uganda-gay-activist-stabbed-steven-kabuye-c3b7aed99134boe1792abd9119b53be2> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> “Ugandan LGBTQ rights activist stabbed in ‘hate crime’”, video clip, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_fc-5hg54w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_fc-5hg54w) (accessed February 17, 2025).



having officially registered with it, effectively banning it from operating in the country.<sup>96</sup> SMUG had since 2004 provided education on sexuality, advocated for health services for LGBT people, monitored and documented human rights violations against LGBT people, and provided services for at risk LGBT people, including medical assistance and alternative housing.<sup>97</sup> According to its director, it had engaged over 100 people as volunteers over the years.<sup>98</sup>

In 2012, the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB), the body responsible for the registration of the names of companies and nongovernmental organizations, rejected SMUG's application to register its name, on the grounds that same-sex conduct is criminalized.<sup>99</sup> In June 2018, a court dismissed a case challenging the URSB's refusal to register SMUG. The judges agreed with the respondents that SMUG was promoting "illegal behavior" and contended that both its name and its objectives were prejudicial to the public interest.<sup>100</sup> In March 2024, the Ugandan Court of Appeal upheld this decision.<sup>101</sup>

In 2021, events surrounding claims made by "ex-gay" campaigner Elisha Mukisa, against prominent LGBT rights organizations and activists sparked what would eventually lead to SMUG's banning and the reintroduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Beginning in 2021, over the course of several months Mukisa made visits to the offices of some of these LGBT rights groups. In August 2021, he staged a makeshift demonstration at the offices of the Human Rights and Protection Forum (HRAPF), the legal aid nongovernmental organization in Kampala, filming the office premises and broadcasting the events live on his Facebook account.<sup>102</sup> On May 19, 2022, Mukisa visited the offices of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) in Kampala. During his visit, a confrontation between

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<sup>96</sup> "Statement on halting the operations of sexual minorities Uganda", The National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organisations, press release, August 5, 2022, <https://www.ngobureau.go.ug/en/news-and-notice/statement-on-halting-the-operations-of-sexual-minorities-uganda>, (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>97</sup> SMUG International, undated, <https://smuginternational.org/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>98</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Frank Mugisha, director of Sexual Minorities Uganda, Kampala, November 15, 2022.

<sup>99</sup> "SMUG VS URSB Case Postponed to 8<sup>th</sup> June", *Kuchu Times*, May 31, 2017, <https://www.kuchutimes.com/2017/05/smug-vs-ursb-case-postponed-to-8th-june/>, (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>100</sup> Boris Dittrich (Human Rights Watch), "From the Americas to the Far East, Courts Are Advancing LGBT Rights" commentary, *Advocate*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/30/americas-far-east-courts-are-advancing-lgbt-rights>.

<sup>101</sup> Larissa Kojoué, "Ugandan Appeals Court Shatters LGBT Rights Group", commentary, Human Rights Dispatch, March 21, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/21/ugandan-appeals-court-shatters-lgbt-rights-group>.

<sup>102</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Adrian Jjuuko, November 11, 2022.

Mukisa and a staff member of the organization ensued. Mukisa filed a complaint at a nearby police station. When two SMUG staff – Diane Sydney Bakuraika and Hanifah Nabulime – went to the same police station to report Mukisa for damaging SMUG office property they were instead arrested and detained for two days before being charged with assaulting Mukisa.<sup>103</sup>

According to a lawyer representing the SMUG staff, the police did not follow up on the complaint made by the staff of SMUG against Mukisa.<sup>104</sup>

After the incident at the SMUG office, Mukisa wrote letters to government offices, including the NGO Bureau, making claims that SMUG had recruited and forced children into filming pornographic videos.<sup>105</sup> Mukisa also met with the speaker of parliament, Anita Among, and the Minister of Gender Health and Social Development.<sup>106</sup>

The NGO Bureau then summoned SMUG to a meeting during which they asked SMUG to provide information about the organizations' operations, their location and partners.<sup>107</sup> Finally, on August 3, 2022, the National Bureau for NGOs banned SMUG from operating on the grounds that it had not officially registered with the bureau, ignoring that the organization was unable to register with it because the URSB, another government institution, had refused to register its name – a prerequisite to register as a nongovernmental organization.<sup>108</sup>

During this period Mukisa also gave a series of interviews posted online, detailing his claims that he and others had been “recruited” by SMUG into homosexuality, and coerced

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<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Fridah Mutesi, Wednesday, June 7, 2023. “Uganda: LGBTI+ Rights Defenders arrested after turning to the police for help”, *Civil Rights Defenders*, June 10, 2022, <https://crd.org/2022/06/10/uganda-lgbti-rights-defenders-arrested-after-turning-to-the-police-for-help/>, (accessed February 17, 2025). On March 20, 2025 – nearly two years after this incident - Frank Namanya, Grade 1 Magistrate at Nakawa Chief Magistrates Court dismissed the case due to lack of evidence ([https://theugpost.com/court-throws-out-case-against-lgbtq-activists-after-three-year-battle/?trk=feed\\_main-feed-card\\_feed-article-content&mp=1](https://theugpost.com/court-throws-out-case-against-lgbtq-activists-after-three-year-battle/?trk=feed_main-feed-card_feed-article-content&mp=1)).

<sup>104</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Fridah Mutesi, June 7, 2023.

<sup>105</sup> Life and Family Foundation Uganda's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=617801263281196> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>106</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Douglas Mawadri, November 15, 2022.

<sup>107</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Adrian Jjuuko, November 17, 2022.

<sup>108</sup> Oryem Nyeko, “Uganda Bans Prominent LGBTQ Rights Group”, commentary, Human Rights Dispatch, August 12, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/12/uganda-bans-prominent-lgbtq-rights-group>.

into acting in gay pornographic movies.<sup>109</sup> These false claims received widespread media coverage.<sup>110</sup> On September 20, 2022, people identifying themselves as Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development officials and human trafficking police raided SMUG's offices, confiscated property and told the guards they were there to look for children who had been "recruited."<sup>111</sup> Staff from SMUG reported the incident to a nearby police station but at time of writing had yet to see any outcome of the report.<sup>112</sup>

In January 2023, local media reported the leak of a draft report by the NGO Bureau, seen by Human Rights Watch, which identified 26 nongovernmental organizations and LGBT rights groups, including SMUG, that it accused of "promoting homosexuality" and "luring children into homosexuality" through "forced recruitment." The report recommended barring any groups identified as "promoting LGBTIQ activities" from operating, and suggested that individual activists should be "profiled" and prevented from forming similar organizations.<sup>113</sup>

### *Queer Youth Uganda*

On November 21, 2022, the office of Queer Youth Uganda – a youth-led LGBT rights organization - in Kampala was raided. Alex Kisaka, the head of programs, who was arrested with the group, described how at around noon on that day, five police officials, not in uniform, entered the office premises and demanded to see the organization's executive director. After demanding to know the identities of the people in the office, the officers arrested six staff, and seized computers, laptops and files, as well as several mobile phones from the group. The officers ordered staff to open their phones and took pictures of text messages and photographs stored on their phones.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> "Mukisa Elisha Sexually Exploited by Filming Gay Porn by SMUG", video clip, YouTube, August 31, 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndGoEVo-xgE&ab\\_channel=LIFAMUganda](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndGoEVo-xgE&ab_channel=LIFAMUganda) (accessed February 17, 2025)

<sup>110</sup> Frank Kisakye, "How Ugandan boys get into gay ranks", *Observer*, October 19, 2022, <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/75572-how-ugandan-boys-get-into-gay-ranks> (accessed February 17, 2025); Life and Family Foundation Uganda's Facebook page, <https://fb.watch/ql2a6stfgp/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>111</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Douglas Mawadri, November 15, 2022. Human Rights Watch phone interview with Frank Mugisha, October 7, 2022.

<sup>112</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Douglas Mawadri, November 15, 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Jacobs Odongo Seaman, "Leaked report shows intent to criminalise gay activities", *Daily Monitor*, February 12, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/leaked-report-shows-intent-to-criminalise-gay-activities-4120836>, (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>114</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Alex Kisaka Head of Programmes, Queer Youth Uganda, Kampala, May 19, 2023.

One of the people arrested said the police officers asked them for money while they were in the office to “close this [case] off.” When the group refused, the officers put the group in a van.<sup>115</sup>

The six were taken to a police station about 15 kilometers away and detained until the evening of November 23, beyond the legally permitted 48 hours, without charge. During their detention the police accused them of various crimes, including “subversive activities”. A lawyer for the organization said that when the six were released on police bond they were told they faced charges of “electronic fraud.”<sup>116</sup>

The lawyer also told Human Rights Watch that because the police had taken the staff to a station far from their office, it had taken the organization two days to locate the group.<sup>117</sup>

The group faced mistreatment during their arrest and detention. One detainee described how a female officer during the initial arrest attempted to pull down the skirt of one of the female staff and attempted to slap her. During their detention at the police station, officers used derogatory homophobic terms against the group. Additionally, two members of the group suffering from malaria and another with a shoulder injury were not given access to medical care.<sup>118</sup>

After being released on bond, the group continued to face harassment. Police officers approached one of the former detainees, trying to extort money from him and the others who were arrested, telling them, “Tell your friends if they really want their phones back and this case to be closed, they need to give money.”<sup>119</sup>

The group was eventually told that the charges against them were dropped due to lack of evidence. Nevertheless, Kisaka explained that the arrests have had a chilling effect on the staff, affecting their work and forcing them to “live underground” and adopt new precautions to ensure their safety.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Joseph, May 24, 2023.

<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Douglas Mawadri, November 15, 2022.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Alex Kisaka, May 19, 2023.

<sup>119</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Joseph, May 24, 2023.

<sup>120</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Alex Kisaka, May 19, 2023.

### *Peace and Comfort Foundation Uganda*

On March 16, 2023, police officers in Jinja raided the office of Peace and Comfort Foundation Uganda, an LGBT rights group, beat, and arrested six staff. The staff was holding a meeting at their office that day to discuss mental health with their clients.

A witness told Human Rights Watch that about 10 police officers arrived as the group held the meeting and began questioning why there were only men in the office. The officers then put the witness and five others in a police vehicle and “paraded them all over town, with sirens, telling the public how they have caught homosexuals.” The police also confiscated computers, laptops, and a banner belonging to the organization.<sup>121</sup>

The police made a public announcement accusing the group of being part of a “criminal sex gang” that was “actively involved in the grooming of young boys into acts of sodomy, recruiting of male adults into gay practices, recording of pornographic and sex videos of children and other unnatural sex practices,” and claimed that they “recorded sex videos and also streamed live sessions, which they submitted to LGBTQ donors for funding of their activities.”<sup>122</sup>

The group was kept in police detention in Jinja for six days, beyond the legally permitted maximum of 48 hours, before being taken to court, where they faced charges of “doing an act of gross indecency.” A magistrate denied the group bail on the grounds of “public interest,” according to a lawyer who represented the group, and they were remanded to Kirinya prison in Jinja for four months, before being released in July 2023.<sup>123</sup> The group continues to be required to report to a magistrate’s court once a month pending trial.<sup>124</sup>

One of the people arrested told Human Rights Watch that their arrest and the media coverage of it outed him to his family and community. He said that the arrests had a deep impact, especially as the work of the organization also stalled.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Human Rights Watch phone with Andrew, October 1, 2024.

<sup>122</sup> Wilfred Kamusiime, “6 Suspects arrested in Jinja belong to a criminal sexual network”, Uganda Police Force, March 20, 2023, <https://upf.go.ug/6-suspects-arrested-in-jinja-belong-to-a-criminal-sexual-network/> (accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>123</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Justine Byala, May 22, 2023.

<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Watch phone with Andrew, October 1, 2024.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Men of the Night*

On March 21, 2023, the day Parliament passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act, security officers raided the office premises of Men of the Night, a male sex worker rights organization, between 7 and 10 p.m. and arrested its executive director. According to a lawyer familiar with the case, the officers drove the director around Kampala, stopping at various sites including a police station, a hotel, and a petrol station, and extorted five million shillings (about US\$1,300) from him. The lawyer says the police released the director on condition that he promise to try to get them more money to close his police case file.<sup>126</sup>

## **Harassment and Threats towards People Supporting LGBT rights**

People who have supported LGBT rights in Uganda, especially those who oppose the Anti-Homosexuality Act, have faced harassment and threats, including threatening phone calls and text messages. This became heightened during the period leading up to the tabling of the bill and its eventual passing by parliament.

### *Harassment of Lawyers and Paralegals*

Lawyers and paralegals providing legal support to LGBT people were targets of this heightened harassment. Police, in some cases, arrested lawyers who had gone to provide legal support to victims and questioned them why they represent them. Sean Awali Shibolo, the executive director of the Robust Initiative for Promoting Human Rights, an Mbale-based legal aid organization for LGBT people, said this happens frequently in both Kampala and in rural areas, where police officers will label lawyers as homosexual because of who they are representing and “treat lawyers the same as the suspects who are their clients at the police stations.”<sup>127</sup> Brian a paralegal, described how on March 21, 2023 when he went to a police station in Kasangati on the outskirts of Kampala to secure a police bond for a trans man accused of theft, “They [police officers] were asking why do I stand for such people? ... Like, ‘Why? Why am I helping such people?’”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch WhatsApp correspondence with Mary, July 24, 2023.

<sup>127</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Shibolo Sean Awali, March 22, 2023.

<sup>128</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Brian, May 16, 2023.

Another lawyer confirmed that police do accuse lawyers of being gay themselves and ask them questions like, “Why is it always you, the same person coming to defend homosexuals?”<sup>129</sup> The lawyer also said that are “lots of reports of community paralegals who are no longer able to reside in their places of residence or to work with police stations where they live because of things like that.”<sup>130</sup>

A Kampala-based LGBT rights activist told Human Rights Watch that he began to receive calls from unknown people around March 2023, around the time when the bill was introduced in parliament, accusing him of “promoting homosexuality in Uganda” and “spoiling” or corrupting children. He also described visits to his home from unknown people looking for him at night. These incidents made him fear what might happen to him due to the nature of his work. In May 2023, he received a message saying: “Why do you not practice LGBT in America and leave Uganda alone.” Like other activists who spoke to Human Rights Watch, the activist has relocated several times as a safety measure because of the threats against him.<sup>131</sup>

### *Online Harassment*

LGBT people and their allies said they have regularly received threats on various online platforms.

Activists described to Human Rights Watch how they received threats of rape, death, and outing, as well as derogatory comments directed at women due to their “masculine” appearance, amid the Anti-Homosexuality Bill parliamentary debate. Unknown people regularly published personally identifiable information about people working with LGBT rights organizations without their consent, a harmful act known as “doxxing” that exposed them to harassment and other abuse.

Derrick Kimera, the founder and executive director of Let’s Walk Uganda, said he received online threats and harassment as early as August 2022, but this became more intense after his organization was mentioned in the leaked NGO Bureau report listing 22

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<sup>129</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Justine Byala, May 22, 2023.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Daniel, March 16, 2023.

organizations being investigated for “the promotion homosexuality in Uganda,” which was publicized in the media in January 2023.

Kimera said he began to receive abusive messages and phone calls after the NGO Bureau list of organizations was circulated, and his photo, identifying him as the director of one of the organizations, was shared in WhatsApp groups. Kimera also received threatening comments on his TikTok account, such as a message that said, “I know the car you drive. I’ll get you. We shall get you.”<sup>132</sup>

Kimera told Human Rights Watch that this harassment ramped up again around the time the Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed by parliament when he used the account to talk about the law and advocate against its passing.

I would do interviews with queer people and record myself disagreeing with anything that is anti-queer. [Before] I was used to those negative comments but when the [Anti-Homosexuality Act] was passed things became really bad. People were then thinking they have the right to say and do whatever they want to activists.<sup>133</sup>

He reported this harassment to TikTok three times but received no response. Instead, weeks later TikTok permanently banned his account in July 2023. Kimera said TikTok did not explain why his account was banned nor allow him to appeal the decision. He was aware of 13 other Ugandan LGBT activists whose accounts were banned around the same time.<sup>134</sup>

Joan, who works with HerInternet, a feminist digital rights organization, told Human Rights Watch that she was aware of several cases of the staff of less visible LGBT rights organizations, that were not on the list of 22, being targeted online during this period. According to Joan, individuals had shared the names and pictures of people who attended workshops organized by these groups in closed WhatsApp chat groups, leading to them

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<sup>132</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Derrick Kimera, April 14, 2023.

<sup>133</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Derrick Kimera, April 7, 2025.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*



being harassed.<sup>135</sup> Joan herself was also doxxed on WhatsApp when her photograph, name and place of employment were circulated in a group.<sup>136</sup>

Tracy, an LGBTQ activist, said she received heavy backlash a month before President Museveni signed the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill into law, when her organization undertook activism online to spread awareness of the harms of the then potential law. Tracy had a prominent platform on TikTok where she hosted discussions with Ugandan lesbian and gay individuals about their issues amid the rampant homophobia that surrounded the introduction and eventual passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.<sup>137</sup>

Through these live sessions, she aimed to counter the negative portrayals of LGBT people that the media were heavily promoting, especially that being LGBT is not equivalent to pedophilia. Every evening, Tracy and her guests provided the public with insights into queer people's lived experiences, a series of discussions that continued for two weeks.

It did not make some people happy. I started getting threats on those Tik Tok lives. I kept going but those threats started getting serious... I had three people relentlessly stalking me. If I was on a live, they would say, "Isn't this where you are?" I started getting anonymous calls. One time at 3 am when I was sleeping a man called me and said, "You've been acting like you're untouchable, but I just saw you," and they mentioned the bar [she had previously been at that evening].<sup>138</sup>

Tracy continued to receive these phone calls through April 2023 when she moved about 40 kilometers away to escape the threats. Soon after this she and a friend, who is a trans woman, were attacked by three men one night in her new home. One of the men said, "I am not just beating you for your unholiness but because you make me ashamed to be [ethnically] Ankole. If we want, we can kill you and no one will look for you." The men also beat and sexually assaulted her friend.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Joan, February 5, 2023

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Tracy, February 23, 2024

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Tracy, February 23, 2024.

## Police Harassment

Police in Uganda have regularly failed to hold to account perpetrators of abuses against LGBT people such as those described above. Instead, they have harassed, extorted, and arbitrarily arrested and detained people on the basis of their perceived or real sexual orientation or gender identity. Police have also subjected or threatened to subject people arrested on the grounds of suspected homosexuality to forced anal exams. Henry Byansi, a lawyer with Chapter Four Uganda, a legal aid organization, told Human Rights Watch that in “most of the cases” the organization has responded to of people accused of committing crimes under the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, their clients had been subjected to forced anal exams.<sup>140</sup>

Brian, who works as a paralegal, described how on March 21, 2023, the day the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was passed by parliament, he witnessed police harass a trans man whom they detained at Kasangati police station on the outskirts of Kampala, on accusations of theft. Even though the bill was not yet in force, the officers threatened the trans man that they would use it against him in the future.

They kept on asking him, ‘Why do you dress like a man?’ ‘Why can’t you be a woman?’ ‘How can you be unmarried at that age?’ Then they are like, ‘We are going to get you a man.’ They told him, ‘We know you are a homosexual and we are going to arrest you when the President signs the Bill.’<sup>141</sup>

Sarah, a trans activist, described how two police officers harassed and sexually assaulted her in January 2023 as she exited a mall in Kampala. The officers took her to a waiting vehicle, handcuffed her, and undressed her, and told her they were taking her to a military base.

They were saying, “Are you a man or a woman? How do you have sex? Who is a man, who is a woman?” They wanted to prove I am not on hormones or transitioning from female to male. They wanted to see how my private parts looked. They were all flashing lights at me. They went through my phone

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<sup>140</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Henry Byansi, April 1, 2025.

<sup>141</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Brian, May 18, 2023.

and texts and said this is evidence. They asked for money. This all happened because I look different.<sup>142</sup>

Sarah said she was rescued by friends who tracked her location after she sent an SOS message. She said friends paid the police one million shillings (about \$270) as a bribe to have her released.<sup>143</sup>

Groups in Uganda say that since the introduction of the law, police have become bolder about entrapping LGBT people on social media and dating applications and subjecting them to online extortion.<sup>144</sup>

Henry Byansi, a lawyer, said that around September 2023 he represented a man who was entrapped over dating apps by police officers and arrested by police who invoked the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.<sup>145</sup> His client arranged to meet someone from the gay dating app Grindr. Upon reaching the meeting, however, a police officer arrested him, and he remained in a police cell for four days, longer than the legally allowed 48-hours, before being released on bond. The police eventually discharged his case.<sup>146</sup>

### Emmanuel

In Kampala, on March 30, 2023, Emmanuel, a 25-year-old gay man, agreed to meet a man while using Grindr. Upon meeting, he realized that the man was different from the person whose pictures had been shared with him. The man told Emmanuel that he was not gay and instead worked for the police. Emmanuel attempted to run away from the policeman who chased him and started shouting that he was chasing a thief. Eventually the policeman and people in the neighborhood caught him, and the officer announced to the people around that Emmanuel was gay.

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<sup>142</sup> Human Rights phone interview with Sarah, February 15, 2024.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Mary, May 18, 2023.

<sup>145</sup> Human Rights interview with Henry Byansi, February 15, 2024.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

“He accused me of things like being a pedophile, that I am gay and I use young underage boys,” Emmanuel said, “So everyone in the neighborhood - especially the women - were so angry at me. They didn’t even listen to my story.”

The man put Emmanuel in a police vehicle with three other men he believes were also policemen, including one in police uniform, and handcuffed him. As they drove the officers insulted him and slapped him, repeatedly asking, “Why are you gay?”

The vehicle eventually stopped outside a police station in Bunga, a Kampala neighborhood, and the first policeman told Emmanuel that if he gave them one million shillings (about US\$270) they would release him. They then allowed him to call a friend who sent him 500,000 shillings using mobile money, a form of mobile financial services. The officers took a picture of Emmanuel handcuffed and sent it to his friend demanding more money. When the friend informed the officers that he did not have any more money, they forced Emmanuel to withdraw the 500,000 shillings in cash from a nearby mobile money store.

Emmanuel said he paid the bribe because he was afraid of what would happen to him. He did not report the incident to the police.

“I felt like these guys had mercy on me and let me go,” Emmanuel explained, “Because even if I didn’t have the one million, if they kept on asking for it I would have maybe called someone else. Maybe called my mum and told her to send the money. Because being in a cell for being gay is the worst for a gay man in Uganda. I was just happy I was released.”<sup>147</sup>

## Evictions

Although the courts ultimately annulled provisions in the Anti-Homosexuality Act that prohibited leasing to people committing acts of homosexuality, in the immediate aftermath of the Act’s passing, landlords used those provisions to evict LGBT people from their homes.

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<sup>147</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Emmanuel, June 21, 2023.

<sup>148</sup> The Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum noted that in 2025, the number of cases of discriminatory acts against individuals based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression reported to the group dropped significantly after those provisions were annulled. This is in part because many had been eviction cases, which HRAPF believes is indicative of the “detrimental impact” of those sections of the law.<sup>149</sup>

Below are three illustrative cases in which landlords issued eviction notices to shelters for homeless LGBT people in the period after the initial bill was first introduced in parliament, following public discussion of the provision in the bill to criminalize landlords who rented their premises to LGBT people. These evictions affected dozens of individuals.

### *Talented Youth Community Fellowship Uganda*

On February 20, 2023, the landlord for a building hosting the Talented Youth Community Fellowship, a church which also provides shelter to transgender people in Wakiso, served its directors with an eviction notice giving the residents only 14 days to vacate the premises. The notice, which Human Rights Watch read, accused the group of holding meetings where “boys behave like girls and girls behave like boys ... which is inappropriate to our children,” and said that the landlord had “received several complaints from the society that you are promoting and recruiting teenagers into homosexuality hence exposing our young children to such sinful acts of immorality.”<sup>150</sup>

The founder of Talented Youth Community Fellowship, Mama Annet, said the eviction impacted the church and its residents badly after they were forced to leave: “Where we are right now, we are living temporarily. We are living in fear. We are traumatized. We are keeping indoors,” she said, “If you go outside, they’ll start to point at you, saying ‘Look at

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<sup>148</sup> Other groups documented similar evictions in various parts of Uganda. For example, the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum’s ‘Report On Violence And Violations Based On Real Or Presumed Sexual Orientation Or Gender Identity During the Month Of July 2024’, published in August 2024, reported in July 2024, there were 10 cases of evictions from rented property that were reported to HRAPF’s legal aid clinic, affecting 11 individuals in July 2024, in Kampala, Wakiso, Mbarara, Gulu and Kitgum districts. The evictions were perpetrated primarily by the landlords working with the local council leaders and neighbors who issued residents with eviction notices on suspicion of them being homosexual or after they had been arrested on charges related to the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act. Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, *Report on violence and violations based on real or presumed sexual orientation or gender identity during the month of July 2024*, August 12, 2024, <https://hrapf.org/?mdocs-file=11494&mdocs-url=false> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>150</sup> Letter on file with Human Rights Watch.

them. Look at them.’ The environment is not good for us. These are homophobic people.”<sup>151</sup>

### *Eviction of Transgender People after Rape*

After a group of men raped a 19-year-old trans man living in a makeshift shelter for LGBT people in Kampala on March 18, 2023, Maria who runs the shelter, received a notice from her landlord and the village chairman after community members began to “complain” about the shelter’s residents.

The people who raped him were staying around the area, so they told the people in the area that, “the people that are living in that house are gays.” And the [Anti-Homosexuality] bill was being passed, so people started to condemn us and started to shout whenever I used to pass by or I used to go to the shop. So, the landlord came with the chairman and they told us to go find another area or another district. They don’t want us to stay in their area again.<sup>152</sup>

The shelter residents lived in a state of fear, and locked themselves in the house for three days, before being forced to leave.<sup>153</sup> The incident had a devastating impact on the mental health of the shelters’ residents.

Our mental health is not right. We are just messed up. Some of my friends were even thinking of taking their own lives because their families chased them away [once] they got to know their gender or orientations and so they cannot go back. And they don’t have anywhere to go.<sup>154</sup>

### *Initiative for Transformation Empowerment*

In October 2023, the landlady of the property hosting the offices of the Initiative for Transformation Empowerment, an advocacy group for trans men, gender non-conforming people and intersex persons, informed the staff that she could no longer accommodate

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<sup>151</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Mama Annet, March 27, 2023.

<sup>152</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Maria, April 5, 2023.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

them. According to a staff member Human Rights Watch interviewed, she told the group that she feared mob violence, potential arson, and attacks on the group and worried that she might face arrest under the new Anti-Homosexuality Act, which could penalize anyone housing an LGBT person. The interviewee said that before the law was passed the landlady “only cared about collecting rent.”<sup>155</sup>

Before the eviction, the organization had been supporting up to 50 individuals and provided several services to its community, including health services, a drop-in-center for at-risk transgender people, and business training, recognizing the challenges trans people face in securing employment in Uganda.

Even though the group had continued to work online, the eviction had a serious impact, according to a worker at the organization: “The way we work has been affected – our speed, and our creativity. We’re doing less work. It’s also made our donors step aside. We are not able to do the work we were doing before.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Arthur Mubiru, April 12, 2024.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

## Impact of the Anti-LGBT climate

Parents of LGBT children have always been worried about their children's safety. And now, having a law that legalizes that homophobia and transphobia makes those worries and concerns and fears a thousand-fold. While the LGBT community, or those who are perceived to be LGBT, are most at risk, our families are sharing in that by association with this child who the government is using as leverage for their own political agenda. They're willfully and recklessly putting our lives at risk.

— Clare Byarugaba, founder and convener of Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays Uganda (PFLAG)

The passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the ensuing attacks on sexual minorities and LGBT rights groups in Uganda have devastated several already marginalized communities and intensified existing vulnerabilities. These attacks have disproportionately harmed beneficiaries of crucial services provided by LGBT rights organizations, whose work has been blocked by the authorities' actions.

### Limitations on the Work of LGBT Rights Groups

People working for LGBT rights groups described how the government's clampdown on LGBT rights groups, including raids of their offices and arrests of their staff, has left their organizations unable to implement their work.

The director of the Foaster Foundation for Health Care, a Kampala-based organization for LGBTQ people and women at risk of, living with, and affected by HIV, said the August 2022 closure of SMUG by the NGO Bureau impacted their ability to implement their programs. SMUG was one of their funders and “used to support us with food, mental health support, like giving us counselors, giving us food for shelter inmates, and also supporting us with some rent because we really pay in a lot of [rent] money.” SMUG also provided moral support for the Foaster Foundations' workers and connected them to other funders.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Gerald Muwonge, December 3, 2022.



The crackdown has also disrupted mental health services that SMUG used to provide for free for up to 74 people.<sup>158</sup> This was particularly significant in a context where private mental health services are prohibitively expensive for most people, and LGBT people are reluctant to seek services because of potential hostility and discrimination.<sup>159</sup>

Allan Mwasa, the director of strategic initiatives at SMUG, described how valuable the sessions were to the people who participated in them:

Many people, up to now, they tell me that it was the best time they've ever had in their entire life. We met, we played. It was like a group therapy for an entire day: playing, healing, having a collective healing support group kind of thing, making people get awakened to their inner child. It's hard to also do that right now. We cannot even come together so that people don't feel that they're alone or have candid conversations around their mental health with their peers, and they can also actually heal their colleagues through telling their story.<sup>160</sup>

Mwasa said the Anti-Homosexuality Act's introduction, and the governments ongoing clampdown on LGBT people, resulted in people seeking fewer services, because "they fear disclosure, and they fear that they'll be arrested or they're going to be known as belonging to the LGBTQ community."<sup>161</sup>

The government's clampdown on LGBT rights, and in particular the closure of SMUG, created a climate of fear for workers and activists working with smaller organizations. One activist told Human Rights Watch:

The fact that we all look up to SMUG as this big organization and the fact that it was closed – we're now thinking 'How about us? What will happen to us?' We are worried now – what will come next? It's really, really traumatizing.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Allan Mwasa, November 22, 2022.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Linda, December 4, 2022.

## Negative Impact on Family Members of LGBT people

Human Rights Watch interviewed nine parents of LGBT Ugandans about the ways in which the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the months-long anti-LGBT climate that preceded its passing impacted them.

Seven of the nine interviewees belong to Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Uganda, a support group for parents of LGBT people.<sup>163</sup>

In March 2023, this group urged President Museveni in an open letter to not sign the newly passed Anti-Homosexuality Bill into law, writing:

No parent should ever be put in such a position as we find ourselves today least of all by a legislative body elected by Ugandans to represent and pass laws that protect all Ugandans. We have always loved our children, and this did not change when we learned that they are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex respectively. Religious fundamentalists continue to condemn our children as outcasts and criminals who are destined for imprisonment through the mainstream and social media. It has been horrific to watch this form of hate speech against our children.<sup>164</sup>

All nine of the parents said that their support for their LGBT family members had impacted them and their families negatively. These included being subjected to verbal and physical attacks, rejection by their families and communities, domestic violence, and, for those who owned businesses, financial challenges.

### *Verbal Attacks and Threats*

Five family members interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that in the months running up to the tabling of the then-Anti-Homosexuality Bill – as well as the months following it – they had been subjected to increased verbal attacks and threats in their communities.

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<sup>163</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Clare Byarugaba, April 12, 2023.

<sup>164</sup> “Open Letter to President Museveni from mothers of LGBTQ+ individuals”, *Monitor*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/letters/open-letter-to-president-museveni-mothers-of-lgbtq-individuals-4175896> (accessed February 17, 2025).

Grace who has a child who identifies as gender non-binary, said that in the two months preceding the tabling of the now-law, people in her community harassed and berated her and her husband because they have an LGBT-identifying child and threatened her daughter:

[They would say], ‘You are going to lose your child. If you don’t talk to your daughter, she is going to be killed.’ They started blaming me as a mother, saying that I didn’t do what I was supposed to do; that I spoiled the child. So now, at any time, she is going to be killed because those things are not allowed in Uganda. ‘Now you are going to lose your child.’<sup>165</sup>

Sharon is the mother of a 24-year-old transgender woman. She said, five years before when their community discovered that her daughter is transgender people were “so negative” towards her and her daughter. Her community eventually became more accepting after she “sensitized them about the importance of standing for a diverse child.” However, in the months preceding the tabling of the bill, the hostility resurfaced and she received threats:

Due to the prevailing situation, my daughter has moved away for our safety out of fear of these attacks. Because right now, in Uganda, they started attacking us. People around me, in the community keep on bullying me, saying that when they sign the bill, we will be hit by hammers, arrested, and attacked.<sup>166</sup>

Alice is mother to a 35-year-old bisexual man. She faced verbal attacks from people in her community after the bill was introduced. She described one such attack:

I was going to the market, and the people around me as I was walking, people started pointing towards me, like, ‘You see, you see these stupid people, [these are the] people they are going to kill, because they are also part of the people who are putting curses on us.’ Because here all LGBT people are seen as curses. So, they were telling me that I am one of the

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<sup>165</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Grace, Kampala, May 4, 2023.

<sup>166</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Sharon, Kampala, April 29, 2023.

reasons as to why our society is having that curse – and that curse is my son.<sup>167</sup>

Martha also said that she was subjected to verbal attacks by those in her community, following the tabling of the bill.

The attackers were assuring me that, ‘This time you have no option. You are going to be arrested because the bill has been tabled.’ So, I was assured that this time I will be arrested – and my kids are also going to have it rough.<sup>168</sup>

### *Rejection by Family and Community*

Five of the interviewees told Human Rights Watch that having an LGBT child or sibling whom they accepted and supported led to rejection by their family and communities.

One of the mothers said that starting in the months preceding the tabling of the then-bill, her neighbors and religious community started shunning her and her family. She does not leave her house anymore “because everywhere you walk, they just say: ‘That is the mother of *the other one*.’”<sup>169</sup>

She added that, as part of his sermons, the pastor of her church would single her out.

[He would] say: ‘As you see here there... she changed. She is now behaving like her daughter. And she will do that behavior of her daughter. Now she is no longer a good person. She is no longer a strong Christian.’<sup>170</sup>

She decided to leave her community because of her community’s response to her daughter.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Alice, Kampala, April 8, 2023.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Grace, May 4, 2023.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

In 2014 – when the first Anti-Homosexuality Act was in force – Catherine’s transgender daughter was arrested. After her arrest, she faced verbal and physical attacks by community members. Following the numerous verbal attacks and threats by her community, Catherine decided to relocate her family.

I decided to leave that area and shift to another area, where I’m not so much known. But this also affects me because I’m a lonely person now. I don’t have friends and I’m also, at the end of the day, not that free because I’m worried about those people [in the community] knowing that I have a transgender daughter.<sup>172</sup>

Catherine is afraid of the same thing happening again under the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Mariam, the mother of a 28-year-old transgender woman, said “there are just a few people who understand my and my daughter’s situation and who are supportive” and that she had “lost a lot of friends because of the passing of the [Anti-Homosexuality] bill.”<sup>173</sup>

### *Loss of Income*

Interviewees said their businesses had been negatively affected by the uptick in anti-LGBT rhetoric across the country around the Anti-Homosexuality Act’s passing. Mariam, for example, said that after her name was published in a national newspaper in the open letter to President Museveni by mothers in support of their LGBT children, the small business she ran suffered.

I found that most of my clients had stopped supporting my business just because of my name coming out in the newspaper. Because they were very devastated by my support for my daughter. And they kept on blaming her for bringing a curse into the village.<sup>174</sup>

Grace went through a similar experience. Her child, Evelyn, described what happened to their mothers’ business:

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Mariam, May 3, 2023.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

Since the bill [was introduced], some of the people in our village no longer buy things from us. We have rentals here, but some people ran away because they think that we shall ‘spoil’ them. People started discriminating against us in the community. Talking behind our backs, saying ‘Those people, you should not make contact with them because they are spoiled.’<sup>175</sup>

The negative impacts of societal hostility risks hitting female family members particularly hard, because women in Uganda are already vulnerable to domestic violence and often lack economic independence. Six of the mothers interviewed said they received little or no support from their LGBT child’s father or his side of the family.

One mother said that while her other children were supportive of their sibling, the child’s father had rejected them, telling her: “I do not [father] children of such character, so you should look for his family. That one is not my son.”

Another mother said the domestic violence she had always been subjected to intensified following the tabling of the bill. Her husband viewed her as “the sole cause” of her daughter’s gender identity and as a result, he has used his control over the family’s economic resources to mistreat her and their children:

The father no longer considers them as his children. And he has stopped paying [their] school fees. And many times he has tried to throw them out of the house – just because of one person who has turned out to be transgender. My trans daughter was rejected before the tabling of the bill, but the siblings have been rejected after the tabling of the bill. The tabling of the bill has stirred the whole situation. It has ignited the situation. The rejection was there before, though this time it is too much as compared to how it was before the passing of the bill.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Grace and Evelyn, May 4, 2023.

<sup>176</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Faith, April 8, 2023.

### *Negative Impact on Mental Wellbeing*

All interviewees spoke of how the increasingly repressive environment impacted their and their children's mental health negatively. Uncertainty around the ramifications of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and homophobic statements by political figures in the media and in parliament, in particular, contributed to feelings of anxiety and fear for the parents. One mother described how the ongoing climate affected her:

These statements [by politicians about LGBT people] about the issue have been painful. I'm scared about my child. Sometimes I imagine him being arrested because I don't know how things are going to turn out. It's affected my child as well – his identity is being fought, he has no peace, he is living like a thief, meaning he is not free. Any time you can face danger.<sup>177</sup>

One mother, Martha, described how the hostile rhetoric impacted her child: "It affected him terribly – even after two months [after the law was passed], he was anxious and afraid something would happen."<sup>178</sup>

Sharon, the mother of a transgender woman, said her daughter relocated to another village for her safety, after people in her community told her that LGBT people would be hit by hammers, arrested, and attacked once the Anti-Homosexuality Bill came into law. Sharon said her mental health deteriorated significantly due to the uncertainty of not knowing what would come next."<sup>179</sup>

Alice, the mother of a 35-year-old bisexual man, said that the situation had left her anxious and depressed.

I am not feeling well, however much I try. And to make matters worse, things keep changing. So, the messages that are coming from the anti-gay movement keep on triggering my mind to fear all the time. And I don't know

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<sup>177</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Anne, May 14, 2024.

<sup>178</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Martha, May 14, 2024.

<sup>179</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sharon, April 29, 2023.

the end result of all this. So, my mental health is totally, totally affected and down.<sup>180</sup>

Catherine, the mother of a 27-year-old transgender woman, also reported a deterioration in her mental wellbeing:

The current situation has not left my daughter and I the same because, before, I used to move with my daughter freely, but right now we live in fear. My daughter is facing a lot of verbal attacks, because wherever she passes they point fingers towards her. So, this has created a lot of fear for my daughter. I am always worried if my daughter is ok. I am always worried about what is going to happen next.<sup>181</sup>

Martha said that the months since the law was first tabled affected her greatly, making her withdraw from her community.

I no longer freely associate with others, because of the mockery I get as a mother. At first, I was used to my child being different. But now, the situation that has happened in the last two months - and is still ongoing – has made me go back into that fear ... and pain I had before accepting my child.<sup>182</sup>

Faith said the rejection of her and her child by her husband and community after the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was introduced left her “living a depressed life.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Alice, April 8, 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Catherine, April 8, 2023.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Faith, April 8, 2023.



## Uganda's Legal Obligations

Uganda is a party to several international treaties that impose obligations not to discriminate against people in their enjoyment of a range of fundamental human rights on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

The treaties include the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (the African Charter or also known as the Banjul Charter),<sup>184</sup> the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol),<sup>185</sup> the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),<sup>186</sup> the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),<sup>187</sup> and the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).<sup>188</sup> The fundamental rights guaranteed in the treaties include rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, to the highest attainable standard of health, to housing, to liberty and security, and to protection from violence.

### Freedom from Discrimination

In enacting the Anti-Homosexuality Act, Uganda has violated various guarantees to the right to equality including those set out in the African Charter, the Maputo Protocol, the ICESCR and the ICCPR, which all prohibit discrimination against individuals on the basis of distinctions of any kind. This includes on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Article 2 of the African Charter expressly provides that its rights and freedoms apply "to every individual ... without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status." In the case of *Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum v Zimbabwe*, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) affirmed that the aim of the

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<sup>184</sup> Ratified by Uganda on May 10, 1986.

<sup>185</sup> Ratified by Uganda, on July 22, 2010.

<sup>186</sup> Acceded to by Uganda, on June 21, 1995.

<sup>187</sup> Ratified by Uganda, on January 2, 1987.

<sup>188</sup> Acceded to by Uganda, on November 3, 1986.

principle of non-discrimination in Article 2 of the Charter is to “ensure equal treatment for individuals irrespective of nationality, sex, racial or ethnic origin, political opinion, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.”<sup>189</sup>

The ACHPR also passed Resolution 275 expressly recognizing African states' obligations to prevent violence and abuse against people on the basis of their real or imputed sexual orientation or gender identity. It calls on states to enact and effectively apply “appropriate laws prohibiting and punishing all forms of violence including those targeting persons on the basis of their imputed or real sexual orientation or gender identities, ensuring proper investigation and diligent prosecution of perpetrators, and establishing judicial procedures responsive to the needs of victims.”<sup>190</sup>

Uganda, alongside all states that have ratified the Maputo Protocol, has special obligations to protect women belonging to marginalized groups.<sup>191</sup> In article 2, it requires states parties such as Uganda to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

Article 2(2) of the ICESCR prohibits all discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights including employment, health, education, and housing.<sup>192</sup> In its General Comment No. 20, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which oversees compliance with the ICESCR, affirmed that “sexual orientation and gender identity” are “among the prohibited grounds of discrimination” under the treaty.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum v. Zimbabwe, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Decision, Comm. 245/2002, May. 15, 2006, para. 169, [https://worldcourts.com/achpr/eng/decisions/2006.05.25\\_Zimbabwe\\_Human\\_Rights\\_NGO\\_Forum\\_v\\_Zimbabwe.htm](https://worldcourts.com/achpr/eng/decisions/2006.05.25_Zimbabwe_Human_Rights_NGO_Forum_v_Zimbabwe.htm) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>190</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, “Resolution on Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the basis of their real or imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity,” ACHPR/Res.275(LV)2014, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/275-resolution-protection-against-violence-and-other-human-rights-violations> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>191</sup> Article II(1) of the Maputo Protocol prohibits discrimination against women and requires states to combat it through appropriate legislation and other measures. One of the obligations is to integrate a gender perspective in the state's policy decisions, legislations and in all other spheres of life (Article II(1)(c)). Uganda signed the Maputo Protocol on 18 December 2003 and following that ratified it on 22 July 2010. As such, Uganda must observe the rights provided for in this Protocol, as well as act in accordance with the obligations set out in it.

<sup>192</sup> Uganda acceded to the ICESCR on 21 January 1987 and did not make any declaration or reservation in respect of any treaty provision. The effect of this unqualified accession is that Uganda is bound by the provisions of the ICESCR without modification. Article 2(2) of the ICESCR provides that the states parties to the Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

<sup>193</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 20, Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights, E/C.12/GC/20 (2009), art. 2, para. 2, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/C.12/GC/20> (accessed May 14, 2025).

General Comment No. 20 further clarified that this prohibition against discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is an “immediate and cross-cutting obligation” that applies to acts of “omission” by states parties and requires states parties to eliminate both formal and (e.g., “constitutions, laws and policies”) and substantive (e.g., “attitudes which cause or perpetuate”) discrimination.<sup>194</sup>

Article 2(1) of the ICCPR provides that everyone has the right to enjoy the rights enshrined in the Covenant, regardless of race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, or any other status. The Human Rights Committee (HRC), the treaty monitoring body for the ICCPR, in *Toonen v Australia* found that ‘sexual orientation’ could fall under ‘sex’ as an ‘other status’.<sup>195</sup> The Committee concluded that criminalization of consensual same-sex conduct was discriminatory, violated the right to privacy, and could not be considered a necessary measure under any permitted ground.

It is now settled law that criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct is a violation of international human rights law. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has confirmed that “...the existence of laws criminalizing homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private and the application of criminal penalties against persons accused of such behaviour violate the rights to privacy and freedom from discrimination set forth in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”<sup>196</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also called on states to repeal laws used to criminalize individuals for engaging in consensual same- sex sexual conduct, and ensure that other criminal laws are not used to harass or detain people based on their sexuality or gender identity and expression.<sup>197</sup>

The 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act also allows for discrimination against people with disabilities and older people, by making the offence of homosexuality aggravated if the “victim” has a disability or is older, thereby automatically denying persons with disabilities and older people the capacity to consent to sex. Uganda ratified the UN

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, para 9, 14.

<sup>195</sup> *Toonen v. Australia*, Communication No. 488/1992, U.N. Doc CCPR/C/50/D/488/1992 (1994), <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/undocs/html/vws488.htm> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>196</sup> UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, *Ayissi v. Cameroon*, Opinion No. 22/2006 (Cameroon), A/HRC/4/40/Add.1, p. 91, [https://www.worldcourts.com/wgad/eng/decisions/2006.08.31\\_Ayissi\\_v\\_Cameroon.pdf](https://www.worldcourts.com/wgad/eng/decisions/2006.08.31_Ayissi_v_Cameroon.pdf) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>197</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Doc. (A/HRC/19/41, para 84(d).

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and is obligated to prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds.<sup>198</sup>

Despite the Constitutional Court’s upholding of the law, it is difficult to reconcile the Anti-Homosexuality Act with Uganda’s constitutional provisions that state all “persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life” and “shall enjoy equal protection of the law”. The constitution expressly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of “sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion or disability.”<sup>199</sup> Article 45 of the constitution provides that the rights specifically mentioned in the constitution’s human rights chapter “shall not be regarded as excluding others not specifically mentioned.”<sup>200</sup>

The Constitution defines discrimination as being to “give different treatment to different persons attributable only or mainly to their respective descriptions.”<sup>201</sup>

## Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Assembly and Association

Uganda’s 1995 Constitution guarantees free speech and expression, thought, conscience and belief, and the freedom to assemble which includes “the freedom to form and join associations or unions.”<sup>202</sup>

This reflects similar guarantees under Uganda’s international obligations.

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<sup>198</sup> Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities, Article 5 - Equality And Non-Discrimination, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/article-5-equality-and-non-discrimination> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>199</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, Articles 21(1) and 21(2), ‘Equality and freedom from discrimination’, [https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2018-01-05#chp\\_Four\\_\\_sec\\_21](https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2018-01-05#chp_Four__sec_21) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>200</sup> In *Uganda Law Society & 12 Others v Attorney General (Constitutional Petition 32 of 2020) [2024] UGCC 2*, the Constitutional Court expanded the grounds for non-discrimination to include discrimination between private and publicly employed practitioners. <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/judgment/ugcc/2024/2/eng@2024-02-13>. In 2023, however, the same court in *Hon. Fox Odoi & 21 Others v Attorney General & 3 Others (Consolidated Constitutional Petition 14 of 2023; Consolidated Constitutional Petition 15 of 2023; Consolidated Constitutional Petition 16 of 2023; Consolidated Constitutional Petition 85 of 2023) [2024] UGCC 10*, the judges claimed that there was a “a deliberate omission of sexual orientation as a parameter on the basis of which discrimination could be inferred” from Article 21. <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/judgment/ugcc/2024/10/eng@2024-04-03>.

<sup>201</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, Articles 2 and 21(1).

<sup>202</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, Article 29 of 1995, [https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2018-01-05#chp\\_Four\\_\\_sec\\_29](https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2018-01-05#chp_Four__sec_29) (accessed May 14, 2025).

The African Charter, under article 9, guarantees to everyone the right to express and disseminate their opinion, under article 10 to free association and under article 11, the right to freedom of association, “subject only to necessary restrictions provided for by law in particular those enacted in the interest of national security, the safety, health, ethics and rights and freedoms of others.” The Human Rights Committee, has confirmed that parties to the ICCPR are required to give effect to the rights guaranteed by the Covenant in domestic laws, including freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly and association.<sup>203</sup>

The ICCPR guarantees the rights to freedom of opinion and expression (article 19), assembly (article 21), and association (article 22). Similarly, any restrictions on freedom of association must be “necessary in a democratic society,” and “in the interest of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) codifies states obligations with respect to exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in so far as it relates to the defense of human rights.<sup>204</sup>

In particular article 1 provides that “everyone has the right individually or in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”. In article 5 the Declaration provides that for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels, to meet or assemble peacefully the right to form, join and participate in nongovernmental organizations, associations or groups, and to communicate with nongovernmental or intergovernmental organizations. Article 7 protects the right to discuss and advocate for “new” human rights. This relates to ideas and principles that, in some contexts, may be perceived as unpopular because they address human rights issues that might challenge tradition and culture. In this connection, the special rapporteur on

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<sup>203</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, The Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13 (2004).

<sup>204</sup> The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, UN Doc. A/RES/53/144, March 8, 1999.

human rights defenders has encouraged governments to take additional measures to ensure the protection of defenders who are at greater risk of facing certain forms of violence and discrimination because they are perceived as challenging accepted sociocultural norms, traditions, perceptions and stereotypes, including about sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>205</sup>

Several provisions in the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act contravene the rights to freedom of opinion, expression and association including those that:

- Declare all same sex conduct as nonconsensual.
- Forbid the so-called ‘promotion of homosexuality’ by individuals and civil society organizations through sweeping restrictions that would effectively prevent individuals from defending their rights.
- Criminalize any person who ‘aids, abets, counsels or procures another person to engage in acts of homosexuality’ which would effectively target anyone who offers support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people, including friends, family members, civil society groups and other social support networks.

Ugandan authorities’ raids of LGBT rights organization offices, suspension of nongovernmental organizations, and attempts to prevent their advocacy for LGBT rights cannot be justified as necessary protections for public safety, public health, morals, or the rights of others.

## Homophobic Rhetoric and Hate Speech

International human rights norms limit or qualify guarantees of free expression where acts of expression result in harm or discrimination, and require governments to take steps to prevent such harms. The ICCPR, for example, prohibits “advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.”<sup>206</sup>

However, many so-called hate speech laws claiming to have the goal of curbing violence on racial, ethnic, or other bases have been subject to abuse, with many governments and

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<sup>205</sup> See Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, A/66/203, July 28, 2011, para. 114.

<sup>206</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 20, December 16, 1966, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

other actors using hate speech laws as a pretext to advance a separate political agenda or to target minority rights activists fighting discrimination by the same majority that administers the laws. Specifically in Uganda on September 8, 2022, Parliament amended the 2011 Computer Misuse Act to create the offence of “hate speech.” The new provisions criminalize online language that is likely to “promote hostility against a person, group of persons, a tribe, an ethnicity, a religion or gender.” A person who found guilty of the offence of “hate speech” is liable to a fine or up to seven years imprisonment.<sup>207</sup> However since its passing, this provision has been used to clampdown on individuals for online posts criticizing government officials.<sup>208</sup> Notably the Act did nothing to prevent or dissuade homophobic rhetoric in the lead up to, in the period around, and since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Nevertheless, Uganda should take effective measures to fulfil its obligations to prevent incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence against LGBT people. Government officials and others who effectively wield governmental authority have a duty not to engage in speech advocating discrimination, hostility, or violence toward any individual or social group, including LGBT people. Those in a position of governmental authority should speak out to dissuade others from engaging in discriminatory conduct.

The Committee Against Torture, which oversees compliance with CAT, has found that “hate speech” reflects a hostile environment where torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment are more likely to occur.<sup>209</sup> In 2010, it recommended the establishment of “a comprehensive legal framework to combat discrimination, including hate crimes and speech,” and “ensure the protection of vulnerable groups such as sexual minorities, persons living with HIV/AIDS.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Section 3 of the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022 inserts section 26A “Hate speech” into the 2011 Act.

<sup>208</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025* New York: Human Rights Watch, (2025) Uganda chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/uganda#a18cff>.

<sup>209</sup> UNHCR, “Responding to Hate Speech against LGBTI people October 2013”, Article 19, October 2013, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/art19/2013/en/97988> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>210</sup> UN Committee Against Torture, “Concluding observations on Mongolia,” CAT/C/MNG/CO/1, para. 25, January 20, 2011, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/697110?ln=ar&v=pdf> (accessed May 14, 2025).

## Protection from Violence

The Human Rights Committee, has confirmed that parties to the ICCPR are required to give effect to the rights guaranteed by the Covenant in domestic laws, including freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly and association.<sup>211</sup>

In September 2014 the Human Rights Council adopted a Resolution on Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, expressing its concerns on the acts of violence and discrimination worldwide based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>212</sup>

At the regional level, the African Commission in its 55<sup>th</sup> Ordinary session in 2014 passed a resolution on protection against violence and other human rights violations against people on the basis of their real or imputed gender identity or sexual orientation.<sup>213</sup> The Commission, condemned “the increasing incidence of violence and other human rights violations, including murder, rape, assault, arbitrary imprisonment and other forms of persecution of persons on the basis of their imputed or real sexual orientation or gender identity” and called on states to end all such acts of violence and abuse, whether committed by state or non-state actors. In its 60<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session in 2017, the Commission passed Resolution 376, calling on states to adopt specific legislative measures that recognise the status of human rights defenders, including those that work on sexual orientation and gender identity issues, and to provide protective measures for their colleagues and family members.<sup>214</sup>

Article 4(1) of the Maputo Protocol provides: “Every woman shall be entitled to respect for her life and the integrity and security of her person. All forms of exploitation, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited.”

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<sup>211</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, The Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13 (2004).

<sup>212</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, Resolution 27/32 (2014), A/HRC/RES/27/32 (2014), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/177/32/PDF/G1417732.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>213</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, “Resolution on Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the basis of their real or imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity,” ACHPR/Res.275(LV)2014, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/275-resolution-protection-against-violence-and-other-human-rights-violations> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>214</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, “Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa,” ACHPR/Res.376(LX)2017, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/376-resolution-situation-human-rights-defenders-africa-achpres376> (accessed May 14, 2025).



Article 12 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders provides that the state shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of the legitimate exercise of the relevant rights.<sup>215</sup>

The Committee Against Torture also called the establishment of “effective policing, enforcement and complaints mechanisms with a view to ensuring prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into allegations of attacks against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender.”<sup>216</sup>

Specifically in relation to the conduct of anal examinations in detention for the purpose of criminal prosecution the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment has noted that “humiliating and invasive body searches may constitute torture or ill-treatment, particularly for transgender detainees. In States where homosexuality is criminalized, men suspected of same-sex conduct are subject to non-consensual anal examinations intended to obtain physical evidence of homosexuality, *a practice that is medically worthless and amounts to torture or ill-treatment*” emphasis added.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,” [https://www.ohchr.org/en/civic-space/declaration-human-rights-defenders?utm\\_content=22&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_source=MetaHuRiReport](https://www.ohchr.org/en/civic-space/declaration-human-rights-defenders?utm_content=22&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=MetaHuRiReport) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>216</sup> Committee Against Torture, “Concluding observations on Mongolia,” CAT/C/MNG/CO/1, para. 25, January 20, 2011, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/697110?ln=ar&v=pdf> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>217</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, A/HRC/31/57, January 5, 2016, para. 36, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_31\\_57\\_E.doc#:~:text=In%20the%20report%2C%20the%20Special%20Rapporteur%20assesses%20the,and%20lesbian%2C%20gay%2C%20bisexual%2C%20transgender%20and%20intersex%20persons.](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A_HRC_31_57_E.doc#:~:text=In%20the%20report%2C%20the%20Special%20Rapporteur%20assesses%20the,and%20lesbian%2C%20gay%2C%20bisexual%2C%20transgender%20and%20intersex%20persons.) (accessed May 14, 2025).

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# Appendix I: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions

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Director of Public Prosecutions  
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions  
P.O. Box 1550  
Kampala  
Uganda

Transmitted via email to [REDACTED]

Re: Request for response

Dear Honourable Jane France Abodo,

I write on behalf of Human Rights Watch, an international nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights violations in over 100 countries around the world. We have worked extensively on different human rights concerns in Uganda for many years.

Human Rights Watch is currently undertaking research examining the human rights impacts of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Our research found that in the months before and since the passing of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, many individuals faced a range of physical attacks, including sexual violence, because of their LGBT identity, their perceived sexuality, or their LGBT-rights activism.

Interviewees said individual police officers have harassed, extorted, and arbitrarily arrested and detained them on the basis of their perceived or real sexual orientation or gender identity. In some cases officers entrapped them on social media and dating applications and subjected them to extortion at threat of arrest or prosecution. Officers have, in some cases, arrested lawyers and paralegals when they had gone to provide legal support to victims. Some interviewees told Human Rights Watch that they reported these incidents to the police but have not heard back on their cases.

In addition, police have subjected or threatened to subject people arrested on the grounds of suspected homosexuality to forced anal

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exams for alleged violations of the Anti-Homosexuality Act or the Penal Code.

1. Since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023, has the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions initiated any prosecutions of individuals who have committed crimes against people they targeted on the basis of their presumed sexuality or gender identity? Could you please provide any details of these cases?
2. Since 2023, has your office used anal examinations of suspected violators of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act and/or the Penal Code as evidence for prosecutions? If yes, can you please provide us with any details of these cases?

We would kindly request a written response to these questions and for you to provide any other relevant information you wish by May 2, 2025.

Please note that any information provided will be reflected in our publications as appropriate and at our discretion. All written responses and other information can be sent to Oryem Nyeko, senior Africa researcher, via email to [REDACTED]. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any clarifications.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz

[REDACTED]

Deputy Director, Africa  
Human Rights Watch

# Appendix II: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Inspector General of Police

350 Fifth Avenue, 34<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10118-3299  
Tel: +1-212-290-4700  
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

April 17, 2025

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Abbas Byakagaba  
Inspector General of Police, Uganda Police Force  
Uganda Police Headquarters  
Katalima Road, Naguru  
P.O. Box 7055  
Kampala  
Uganda

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Transmitted via email to: [REDACTED]

Re: Request for response

Dear Inspector General Byakagaba

I write on behalf of Human Rights Watch, an international nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights violations in over 100 countries around the world. We have worked extensively on different human rights concerns in Uganda for many years.

Human Rights Watch is currently undertaking research examining the human rights impacts of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Our research has found that in the months before and since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, many individuals faced a range of physical attacks, including sexual violence, because of their LGBT identity, their perceived sexuality, or their LGBT-rights activism.

Interviewees said individual police officers have harassed, extorted, and arbitrarily arrested and detained them on the basis of their perceived or real sexual orientation or gender identity. In some cases, officers entrapped them on social media and dating applications and subjected them to extortion at threat of arrest or prosecution. Officers have, in some cases, arrested lawyers and paralegals when they had gone to provide legal support to victims.

Some interviewees told Human Rights Watch that they reported these incidents to the police but have not heard back on their cases.

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In addition, police have subjected or threatened to subject people arrested on suspicion of homosexuality to forced anal exams for allegedly violating the Anti-Homosexuality Act or the Penal Code.

1. Since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023 has the Uganda Police Force opened any investigations into physical attacks, including sexual violence, against people who have been targeted because of their perceived sexuality or LGBT-rights activism? If so, have any of those investigations led to prosecutions of those responsible? Could you please provide details on these cases?
2. What steps, if any, does the Uganda Police Force take to ensure victims of physical attacks, including sexual violence, or any other offences who have been targeted on the basis of their perceived sexuality or LGBT-rights activism, can report the crimes in a non-discriminatory environment and feel confident that their reports will be taken seriously and acted upon efficiently?
3. Since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023 have there been complaints that police officers have or are extorting LGBT people, or people perceived to be LGBT, under threat of arrest or prosecution? If so, have those complaints been investigated and have any officers been prosecuted, punished or investigated for this since 2023? Could you please provide details of these cases?
4. What steps, if any, is the Uganda Police Force taking to mitigate the risk that LGBT people or those perceived to be, may be extorted by police officers under threat of arrest or prosecution?
5. On what legal basis are anal exams of suspects performed? Are there any regulations or guidelines that guide these exams? If so, could you please provide them?

We would kindly request a written response to these questions and for you to provide any other relevant information you wish by May 2, 2025.

Please note that any information provided will be reflected in our publications as appropriate and at our discretion. All written responses and other information can be sent to Oryem Nyeko, senior Africa researcher, via email to [REDACTED] Please do not hesitate to contact us for any clarifications.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz

[REDACTED]  
Deputy Director, Africa  
Human Rights Watch



# Appendix III: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Minister of Health

350 Fifth Avenue, 34<sup>th</sup> Floor  
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April 17, 2025

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Honourable Jane Ruth Aceng  
Minister of Health  
Plot 6, Lourdel Road  
Nakasero  
P.O.Box 7272  
Lourdel Road  
Kampala  
Uganda

Transmitted via email to: [REDACTED]

Re: Request for response

Dear Honourable Jane Ruth Aceng,

I write on behalf of Human Rights Watch, an international nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights violations in over 100 countries around the world. We have worked extensively on different human rights concerns in Uganda for many years.

Human Rights Watch is currently undertaking research examining the human rights impacts of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Our research found that the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the ensuing attacks on sexual minorities and LGBT-rights groups in Uganda have devastated several already marginalized communities and intensified existing vulnerabilities. These attacks have disproportionately harmed beneficiaries of crucial services, including mental, and sexual- and reproductive health services, provided by LGBT rights organizations, whose work has been blocked by the authorities' actions.

Many interviewees we spoke to said the increasingly repressive environment impacted their and their relatives mental health negatively.

In addition, we found that Police have subjected or threatened to subject people arrested on the grounds of suspected homosexuality

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to forced anal exams for alleged violations of the Anti-Homosexuality Act or the Penal Code.

1. What steps, if any, has the Ministry taken to ensure that everyone can access public and private healthcare providers and receive quality healthcare goods and services without discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity?
2. What training do public health officials and medical practitioners receive on the prohibition of discrimination and in particular discrimination against LGBT people? Is this training provided through any relevant standards and accreditation systems?
3. Have medical and health officials received training on how to interact with family members of LGBT people who are experiencing harassment and discrimination?
4. What reporting mechanisms are there for patients, medical practitioners, and employees in healthcare settings to anonymously report instances of medical discrimination? In describing these mechanisms could you please share any guidelines that regulate these mechanisms?

We would kindly request a written response to these questions and for you to provide any other relevant information you wish by May 2, 2025.

Please note that any information provided will be reflected in our publications as appropriate and at our discretion. All written responses and other information can be sent to Oryem Nyeko, senior Africa researcher, via email to [REDACTED]. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any clarifications.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz

[REDACTED]

Deputy Director, Africa  
Human Rights Watch



# Appendix IV: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Minister of ICT and National Guidance

350 Fifth Avenue, 34<sup>th</sup> Floor  
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James Ross, *Legal and Policy Director*  
Bruno Stagno Ugarte, *Chief Advocacy Officer*  
Minjon Thelen, *Global Head of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion*

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Neil Rimer, *Co-Chair*

April 17, 2025

Honourable Dr. Chris Baryomunsi  
Minister of ICT and National Guidance  
ICT House  
Plot 10/12 Parliamentary Avenue  
P. O. Box 7817  
Kampala  
Uganda

CC: George William Nyombi Thembo  
Uganda Communications Commission, Executive Director  
Plot 42-22  
Spring Road  
Bugolobi  
Kampala  
Uganda

Transmitted via email to: [REDACTED]

CC: [REDACTED]

Re: Request for response

Dear Honourable Dr. Chris Baryomunsi,

I write on behalf of Human Rights Watch, an international nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights violations in over 100 countries around the world. We have worked extensively on different human rights concerns in Uganda for many years.

Human Rights Watch is currently undertaking research examining the human rights impacts of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Human Rights Watch analyzed media reports of speeches and public remarks by high profile government figures and religious leaders in the months leading up to the introduction of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill and found that these figures made homophobic remarks, falsely equating homosexuality with child abuse, and promoted discrimination against LGBT individuals and organizations advocating for their rights.

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This anti-LGBT rhetoric, contributed to a permissive environment for violence, including sexual violence, against LGBT people and other forms of abuse and discrimination including arbitrary evictions, shunning, and harassment. Parents of LGBT Ugandans indicated that the increasingly repressive environment impacted their and their children's mental health negatively.

1. Have you taken any steps to develop programs to identify and counter hate speech and to promote non-discrimination for all people, including sexual minorities, online, in government publications and in the media by government officials? If so, could you please describe these steps? What steps, if any do you take to identify hate speech, to counter it when you identify it, and to promote non-discrimination for all people, including sexual minorities, online, in government publications and in the media by government officials?
2. Could you please provide us information on any programs you have developed or plan to develop in response to the problem of hate speech and other harmful discriminatory rhetoric against members of the LGBT community, their families and supporters?

We would kindly request a written response to these questions and for you to provide any other relevant information you wish by May 2, 2025.

Please note that any information provided will be reflected in our publications as appropriate and at our discretion. All written responses and other information can be sent to Oryem Nyeko, senior Africa researcher, via email to [REDACTED] Please do not hesitate to contact us for any clarifications.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz

[REDACTED]  
Deputy Director, Africa  
Human Rights Watch

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# “They’re Putting Our Lives at Risk”

## How Uganda’s Anti-LGBT Climate Unleashes Abuse

During the period leading up to and after the passing of Uganda’s 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, high profile political and government figures, in Parliament and through traditional and social media, have spread misinformation and hatred against LGBT people, drumming up public support for the law and leading to an uptick in attacks and harassment targeting LGBT people and LGBT rights groups.

*“They’re Putting Our Lives at Risk”* documents actions by Ugandan public figures and entities, including parliamentarians and government institutions, that culminated in the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. It outlines the rights violations enabled by the law and examines the devastating impact that it has had on the lives of LGBT people, activists, allies, and their families in Uganda.

Human Rights Watch calls on the Ugandan authorities to end their clampdown on LGBT rights groups and refrain from engaging in anti-LGBT rhetoric and hate speech. The Ugandan authorities should also ensure that those responsible for anti-LGBT rhetoric and hate speech that constitutes incitement, criminal conduct such as assaults against LGBT people, and other human rights abuses are held to account. The government should repeal the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act and the Penal Code provisions criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct between adults. It should introduce comprehensive equality and non-discrimination legislation that would protect everyone from violence and discrimination including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.



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