

OPPOSE ANTI-GAY TERROR AROUND THE WORLD

May 17th -- **International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO)** -- is a day when people of good will bring the spotlight of world attention to the problem of anti-gay discrimination and violence and highlight those places where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people are suffering the most egregious human rights violations.

This year's IDAHO focus is three countries in Africa – **Uganda, Kenya** and **Malawi**. Africa may seem far away to most Americans, but purveyors of hate against gays in the United States have played a key, behind-the-scenes role promoting anti-gay legislation in at least one country, Uganda. Moreover, the anti-gay hate pumped out by American evangelicals here and missionaries abroad is simply a more "respectable" version of the hate which is at the root of anti-gay mob violence in Africa.



UGANDA

A bill currently receiving widespread support in the parliament would institute the death penalty for gay sex "repeat offenders," HIV-positive gays who have sex, and gays who have sex with minors or disabled people. In addition, Ugandan citizens who fail to report homosexual activity in 24 hours would face a penalty of up to three years in prison.

In March of last year, a conference was held in Uganda in which three American evangelists who are prominent in a movement that claims they can "cure" gays of their homosexuality warned crowds of thousands Ugandans that the international "gay agenda" threatened to turn their "marriage-based society" into a "culture of promiscuity."

A few short weeks later, David Bahuti, a Ugandan legislator with ties to **The Family**, a secretive group of fundamentalist Christian political, military, and business leaders in Washington, D.C., introduced the draconian Anti-Homosexuality Bill described above. Bahuti is widely seen as a protégé of Rev. Rick Warren, the pastor of a California mega-church and a prominent speaker at President Obama's inauguration. While Warren and other U.S. fundamentalists have since distanced themselves from Bahuti's bill, their message that homosexuality is a "sin" that needs to be "cured" dehumanizes gay people and is used by religious zealots, as in Uganda, to promote discriminatory legislation.

KENYA

Recent events in this country paint a picture of anti-gay hate so severe that the slightest spark can set it off. In February a mob of vigilantes in the eastern part of the country raided a house where a falsely rumored gay wedding was supposedly taking place. Two occupants of the house had to be rescued from the mob by police.

But this was only the beginning of a hysteria that Christian and Muslim leaders, along with radio talk-show hosts, stoked daily from their churches and mosques: They urged new mobs to form to "flush out" gays and lesbians, and take the law into their own hands.



Suspected gay men have been attacked on the street, and recently a government health clinic providing the community with HIV/AIDS services was stormed by 250 vigilantes, and several clinic workers suspected of being gay were dragged from the facility into the street. Fortunately, police arrived just in time to save them from being beaten to death.

MALAWI

But Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Africans are not just victims – many are organizing in very difficult circumstances to assert themselves as human beings entitled to equal rights – part of a worldwide movement demanding equality for LGBT people.

In Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world, a gay couple, 26-year-old **Steven Monjeza** and 20-year-old **Tiwonge Chimbanga**, publicly celebrated their relationship in a traditional engagement ceremony late last year. They were preparing to marry this year but instead were arrested and are now facing 14-year sentences if convicted.

Even in South Africa, a beacon of decency and hope where, unlike the United States, legal equality for Lesbians and Gays is enshrined in the country's constitution, intolerance is still a living presence. "Corrective rape" is used to terrorize alleged Lesbians.



Gay sex is illegal in 36 African countries, with prison sentences ranging from a few months to up to 15 years. In Mauritania, Sudan, and parts of Nigeria it is punishable by death. Police corruption is common in many countries, as Lesbians and Gays who have been forced underground by criminalization are routinely blackmailed by officials who demand payment for their silence.

The situation throughout Africa has become so dangerous for LGBT people that Bishop Desmond Tutu, the great South African human rights activist, was recently prompted to speak out and condemn the growing pandemic of homophobia sweeping the continent. Speaking of anti-gay religious leaders, he said, "If God, as they say, is homophobic, I wouldn't worship that God."

Homophobia is a "crime against humanity," he said, and "every bit as unjust" as apartheid.

"We struggled against apartheid in South Africa, supported by people the world over, because black people were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about; our very skins...It is the same with sexual orientation."

*Please join us on International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO)
as we call attention to the problem of anti-LGBT hate and violence around the world:*

5:30 PM ~ MONDAY, MAY 17
IN FRONT OF MILLENNIUM PARK
CORNER OF MONROE STREET & MICHIGAN AVENUE, CHICAGO

Sponsored by the Gay Liberation Network (www.GayLiberation.net), Courage Nigeria (<http://www.couragenigeria.org>) and the Coalition for Justice and Respect.

*This event is part of a week-long series of events, the Harvey Milk Week of Action.
For more information email LGBTliberation@aol.com or go to <http://chicagomilkweek.wordpress.com/>*