Insult to Injury

An HIV criminalization bill comes after an “anti-homosexuality” bill in Uganda.

August 10, 2010 By Willette Francis

In 2009, Ugandan lawmaker David Bahati introduced an “anti-homosexuality” bill. The initial draft of the bill would subject anyone convicted of performing a “homosexual act” to a possible sentence of life in prison and some HIV- positive lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people to the death penalty.

Some American evangelical groups have been accused of sowing the seeds for this bill. The documentary Missionaries of Hate makes the case that Bahati and others received their inspiration from such groups.

In May, Ugandan lawmaker Beatrice Rwakimari added insult to injury by introducing the 2010 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act. The bill would criminalize HIV transmission and mandate HIV testing for pregnant women and their partners, as well as drug users, sex workers and suspected perpetrators and victims of sexual offenses. The bill would also allow medical professionals to disclose the HIV status of the aforementioned people. If the bill becomes law, anyone disobeying it could be imprisoned for up to 10 years.

In response to international pressure, Ugandan officials are considering watering down the bills. However, as we went to press, it remained likely some versions of the bills would become law.

Critics of these bills claim they would fuel stigma and discrimination against both LGBT people and people with HIV/AIDS. As a result, critics say, HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care efforts would be hampered.

Such criticism shouldn’t be taken lightly. Uganda already faces immense difficulties in providing HIV/AIDS services. About 500,000 people in Uganda need treatment, but less than half are getting it.

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