Antigay Laws Raise HIV Concerns

A lineup of the latest international culprits

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The Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, put a global spotlight on that country's new antigay law—it bans the "propaganda" of "non-traditional sexual relations"—and how it impedes human rights as well as HIV treatment and prevention. Sadly, Russia isn't the only country making such headlines.

In Nigeria this year, President Goodluck Jonathan signed a law criminalizing LGBT people and same-sex marriages. Anyone in such a union faces up to 14 years in jail. What's more, people who operate, support or participate in gay clubs, societies or organizations can be imprisoned for 10 years. Nigeria has the second largest HIV epidemic globally (after South Africa), with an estimated 3.4 million people living with HIV and a 17 percent prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM). UNAIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria released a joint statement expressing "deep concern" that the law could lead to denial of HIV services and "be used against organizations working to provide HIV prevention and treatment services to LGBT people."

Also in Africa, Ugandan lawmakers passed a 2009 bill that allows life in prison for "aggravated homosexuality," a definition that includes HIV-positive people. President Yoweri Museveni initially refused to sign the bill because of a technicality—not enough parliament members were present when it passed—but despite global pressure, he later backtracked, and it is now law. Publishing an open letter to Museveni in a Ugandan newspaper, 60 doctors and eight groups described the law as "a threat to public health."

And in India, the Supreme Court took a surprising step backward for human rights and HIV prevention when it reinstated a law banning gay sex.

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