Pastor Rick Warren Speaks Out Against Antigay Ugandan Law [VIDEO]

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In response to recent speculation he supports a proposed Ugandan bill to further criminalize homosexuality in the East African country, Pastor Rick Warren, founder of the Evangelical Saddleback Church in California—who has been heavily involved in Ugandan religion and politics—has issued a letter and video statement to Ugandan church leaders calling the bill "unjust, extreme and un-Christian toward homosexuals." His response comes after media criticism that he did not respond to the bill sooner and that his teachings against homosexuality might have influenced Ugandan leaders to draft the bill in the first place.

Reportedly, in addition to punishing anyone convicted of performing homosexual acts with life imprisonment, the bill mandates the death penalty if the accused person is HIV positive, a repeat offender, a "person of authority" over the other partner or if the partner is younger than 18. All citizens would be required to report any known homosexual to the police within 24 hours or risk three years in jail.

"As a pastor, I've found that the most effective way to build consensus for social change is usually through direct diplomacy and behind-the-scenes dialogue, rather than through media," said Warren, who, along with his wife Kay, heads Saddleback's HIV/AIDS Initiative. "But because I didn't rush to make a public statement, some erroneously concluded that I supported this terrible bill, and some even claimed I was a sponsor of the bill. You in Uganda know that is untrue."

While he maintains his traditional evangelical views on homosexuality in the video, claiming "all sex outside of marriage is not what God intends" and "Jesus reaffirmed what Moses wrote that marriage is intended to be between one man and one woman committed to each other for life," he urges Ugandan church leaders to reject this proposed legislation.

"As you know, in Africa, it is the churches that are bearing the primary burden of providing care for people infected with HIV/AIDS," Warren says. "If this bill passed, homosexuals who are HIV positive will be reluctant to seek or receive care, comfort and compassion from our churches out of fear of being reported. You and I know that the churches of Uganda are the truly caring communities where people receive hope and help, not condemnation."

He adds, "It would be inconsistent to save some lives and wish death on others. We're not just pro-life. We are whole life."

Watch Warren’s video below.

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