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UGANDA'S 'JAIL THE GAYS' BILL INSTITUTIONALIZES HATE, UNDERMINES HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

TORONTO, February 24, 2014 — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, on behalf of more than 100 members, expresses its profound dismay that Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has signed into law the *Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2009*.

“The bill authorizes and incites a witch-hunt against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Ugandans,” said Richard Elliott, executive director of the Legal Network. “All decent political and religious leaders, including those from Africa and from Canada, must denounce such hatred, and take steps to convince Uganda that this law is ill-advised and damaging to the country’s international reputation.”

The new law prescribes life imprisonment for any sexual activity between two consenting adults of the same sex. It also targets LGBT allies and even the general public. Any person who “aids or abets” another person to engage in homosexuality, or who “promotes” homosexuality, faces seven years in prison. And any “person in authority” who fails to report an act of homosexuality within 24 hours could face up to three years in prison.

The law breaches a number of human rights obligations under treaties ratified by Uganda — including the fundamental principle of non-discrimination, basic personal bodily liberty, privacy rights, rights to a fair trial and against self-incrimination, and freedoms of expression and association. The law will also undermine HIV prevention and treatment efforts by further stigmatizing and criminalizing communities that need access to such services.

Despite widespread international criticism — including from UNAIDS and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights — President Museveni has defended the law by claiming that it upholds “African values” against Western imperialism.

“President Museveni’s comments are either uninformed or purposely misleading,” said Elliott. “It is now widely known that this so-called ‘African’ legislation was conceived and promoted by extremist Christian groups from North America. It is a model these extremists are repeating with blood-chilling success in other parts of the world, including in Russia.”

Over the past months, Canada's foreign affairs minister condemned Uganda's bill, and urged President Museveni to veto it. More recently, as signing seemed imminent, Canadian government officials summoned the Ugandan High Commissioner to Canada, reportedly to discuss their concerns.

"It's not only human rights at stake; it's human lives," said Elliott. "Canada must act in concert with other governments and with civil society organizations, including Ugandan human rights activists, and step up pressure on Uganda."

- 30 -

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