



BY WILLIAM F. FELICE
Guest Columnist

Here's what American Christian fundamentalists are exporting to Africa

“Having lost ground at home on gay rights and women’s rights, the U.S. Christian Right is now exporting its so-called Christian values — rejected and discredited in the United States — to Africa,” a Zambian minister says.



Uganda's legislature recently passed the anti-homosexuality bill. [THEMBA HADEBE | AP]

Uganda's parliament recently week approved a law making it a crime for individuals to identify as LGBTQ+. The bill also provides the government with extensive powers to target gay Ugandans.

While more than 30 African countries ban same-sex relations, according to Human Rights Watch, this new law is the first to outlaw merely identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. The legislation promotes some of the world's harshest anti-gay laws, making some crimes punishable by death and imposing up to 20 years in prison for people identifying as LGBTQ+. Ugandan President Yoweri Musevni has spoken in favor of the statute and is expected to sign it into law.

Christian extremists, often led by U.S. ministers, have been a dominant force behind this hateful legislation. Christianity is the dominate religion in Uganda with more than 80% of the population identifying as Christian. The U.S. Christian Right has been in the forefront in promoting homophobia, reconstructing African history and creating strong sexual politics in Uganda and Africa. U.S. religious leaders actively organize and fund influential African religious organizers to denounce any movement toward LGBTQ equality. In a carefully documented study, Evangelical Rev. Dr. Kapyra Kaoma from Zambia followed the work of the "renewal movements" in three denominations — the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church USA and the Presbyterian Church. Kaoma demonstrates the ways these movements partnered with African religious leaders to destabilize progressive movements within the church and promote homophobia in Africa. The impact has been profound. Tragically, these religious efforts have been successful in painting LGBTQ people as pedophiles, "groomers," and threats to African children.

I asked the Rev. Kaoma why U.S. citizens should feel a human rights duty regarding homophobia in Africa. Kaoma responded: "It is a question of moral responsibility. We have witnessed the globalization of the U.S. 'culture wars.' Having lost ground at home on gay rights and women's rights, the U.S. Christian Right is now exporting its so-called Christian values — rejected and discredited in the United States — to Africa. The American Christian Right tells its African allies that they should stand up to immoral Western gays who are recruiting Africans into the vice of homosexuality." Kaoma continued: "For example, these

Christian fundamentalists go into a country like Zambia (my homeland), which has been historically accepting of homosexuality, and they preach that gays are coming to rape your children, and in particular your boys, and this is what causes Africans to react so violently. They are told it's about their children, and that the 'homosexual agenda' is a threat to their family, nation, and faith."

During his stay in Senegal in 2013, President Barack Obama urged African leaders to make sure that governments don't discriminate against gays and lesbians. And during his 2015 trip to Kenya, President Obama argued that no nation should discriminate against gays and lesbians, comparing it to the segregation of African Americans in the United States. "As an African American in the United States I am painfully aware of what happens when people are treated differently." Obama continued, "If somebody is a law-abiding citizen who is going about their business and working in a job and obeying the traffic signs and doing all the other things good citizens are supposed to do and not harming anybody, the idea that they are going to be treated differently or abused because of who they love is wrong. Full Stop."

In response to Uganda's recent homophobic bill, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the bill "would undermine fundamental human rights of all Ugandans." White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said Washington is "watching this real closely," and did not rule out possible economic "repercussions" if the legislation is implemented.

The United States should respond forcefully to this hateful legislation in Uganda. In addition to possible economic repercussions, the Rev. Kaoma believes that "Americans, especially Evangelical Christians, can help expose the Christian Right at home, hold them accountable and provide information to those fighting for their rights both in the diaspora and in Africa. It is important to support those fighting on the ground." Kaoma continued, "Like in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, the United States can help by raising the plight of LGBT Africans to the U.S. and wider international community."

International human rights law includes a commitment to equal rights and nondiscrimination which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. As the former U.N. high commissioner for human

rights Navi Pillay stated: “The case for extending the same rights to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons as those enjoyed by everyone else is neither radical nor complicated. It rests on two fundamental principles that underpin international human rights law: equality and nondiscrimination.”

Uganda must be held accountable to uphold these basic human rights standards for all of its citizens, including all LGBTQ individuals.



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