

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Sue Walitsky (Cardin) 202-224-4524

Max Gleichman (Durbin) 202-228-5244

CARDIN, DURBIN LEAD SENATE IN URGING UGANDA'S PRESIDENT TO BLOCK ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL LAW

WASHINGTON—**U.S. Senators Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) and Richard J. Durbin (D-IL), both members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,** and 10 other Senators today urged **Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni** to block enactment of a law that would criminalize homosexuality and codify prejudice against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and HIV-positive Ugandans. The bill, which if passed would impose sentences as severe as life in prison or death, runs counter to global declarations of universal human rights and efforts to expand tolerance and health assistance in Africa and worldwide. In addition to Senators Cardin and Durbin, the letter was also signed by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Christopher Dodd (D-CT), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Mark Udall (D-CO), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Daniel Akaka (D-HI) and Diane Feinstein (D-CA).

“Legislating prejudice is wrong for any government in any country. President Museveni must take any and all steps available to end this serious breach of human rights and basic tolerance,” **said Senator Cardin**, who also serves as chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. “Ugandans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or HIV-positive, should not live in fear or be punished for simply living their lives.”

“If this proposal carries the day, their government will undermine years of positive Ugandan leadership combating HIV infections, and instead, will begin pursuing a policy of intolerance,” Durbin, Chairman of the Human Rights and the Law Subcommittee, said. “I urge President Museveni and the Ugandan Parliament, to reject this legislation outright and hope that they, along with the world at large, will rethink policies that institutionalize fear and bigotry.”

The full text of the letter is below. A PDF copy is attached.

The Honorable Yoweri Museveni
President, Republic of Uganda
c/o of the Embassy of Uganda
5911 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the anti-homosexuality bill currently before the Ugandan Parliament.

This troubling legislation would sanction prejudice toward people in Uganda based solely on sexual orientation, or even HIV status. This is in great contrast to trends toward greater tolerance in the global community. By creating harsh penalties for homosexuality, this bill not only codifies prejudice, but could also foster an increase in violence towards people simply based on sexual orientation.

The legislation also requires persons “in authority,” which could include government officials, employers, clergy, or others, to provide information about suspected violations of the Act. It further criminalizes the work done by human rights and health organizations that benefit lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens, claiming those actions to be “homosexual promotion.” Certainly these are not the types of actions to be encouraged as the world strives to reverse violence, poverty, and human suffering caused by divisiveness and repression.

While your nation has been a leader in Africa on many fronts, including the reduction of HIV infections, this proposed legislation will be a glaring setback in Uganda’s human rights standing. Unfortunately, even the mere threat of the new and severe penalties for homosexual behavior suggested in this bill, including life imprisonment and the death penalty, could easily add to an already intolerant atmosphere in Uganda based on sexual orientation.

We understand you have recently raised concerns over the legislation and urge you to do everything within your power to block its advancement. We look forward to continue the process of building a strong and long-lasting relationship between the United States of America and the Republic of Uganda.

Sincerely,

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

Senator Richard J. Durbin

Senator Daniel Akaka

Senator Christopher Dodd

Senator Joseph Lieberman

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

Senator Sherrod Brown

Senator Jeff Merkley

Senator Patty Murray

Senator Mark Udall

Senator Diane Feinstein

Senator Barbara Boxer

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