

## Who was David Kato?

David Kato (1964-2011) was a Ugandan teacher and gay-rights activist, considered a father of Uganda's gay rights movement. Kato was murdered in Jan. 2011, shortly after winning a lawsuit against a magazine which had published his name, photograph, and address in an article identifying him as gay and calling for the execution of homosexuals. The article headline stated "Hang them!" The article published similar information about 100 other people who were known or suspected to be gay.

David Kato was a featured speaker for a November 2009 United Nations-funded conference on human rights, held in Kampala, Uganda. Kato spoke on the issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) rights and the anti-LGBT atmosphere in Uganda. Kato's voice was shaky and barely audible, due to his nervousness and his legitimate fear of being arrested and detained. Members of the Uganda Human Rights Commission "openly joked and snickered" during the speech. Publicly identifying himself as gay, David Kato was at risk for harassment, arrest and imprisonment, and beatings.

**Background:** Homosexuality is already illegal in Uganda, punishable by incarceration for up to 14 years. Harsh anti-gay laws in many sub-Saharan African countries are widely considered to be a remnant of British colonialism.

Similar to many other African nations, gays in Uganda currently face an atmosphere of physical abuse, vandalism to their property, blackmail, death threats, and "correctional rape".

In Oct. 2009, a private member's bill was submitted to Ugandan parliament. The bill proposed the death penalty for homosexual acts, especially "repeat offenders" and contained a special category of "aggravated homosexuality" where the person committing the offense is HIV positive. As well, the bill would require anyone knowing of a person who is gay to report the "offender". Failure to report would mean this person is also considered an offender, and would be liable on conviction to a fine, or to imprisonment up to three years.

This bill was the result of a three-day conference conducted by American evangelical Christians in 2008 in Kampala, Uganda. The focus of the conference was a pseudo-scientific attempt to convince those in attendance that homosexuality threatened Ugandan family and culture, that homosexuals were recruiting children and that homosexuality could be "healed".

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch condemned the bill, calling it "a product of a campaign by evangelical churches and anti-gay groups that has led to death threats and physical assaults against Ugandans suspected of being gay." The proposed bill attracted much negative attention worldwide, with many countries and charitable organizations threatening to cut off aid to Uganda should the bill pass.

Under pressure, the bill was defeated in 2009. In 2011 the bill was presented once again in Ugandan parliament, and was defeated due to last-minute pressure from aid groups, progressive religious groups, and government leaders including President Barack Obama. The bill will be presented again in 2013.