Published on *Treatment Action Campaign* (http://tac.org.za/community)

TAC Condemns Homophobia in Africa

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Created *2010/03/17 - 9:32am*
17 March, 2010 - 09:32 ? moderator

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) strongly condemns homophobia in all its forms. TAC is concerned about the inhuman and homophobic legislation being proposed in Uganda and a wider crackdown against gays and lesbians in other African countries. TAC demands the decriminalisation of all consensual sex between adults irrespective of sexual orientation.

The recent debate in Uganda about a draft bill to criminalize homosexuality through the implementation of the death sentence has raised awareness around homophobia and homophobic legislation in the region. It has also raised questions on how this rhetoric and/or legislation is harmful to public health and particularly in promoting access to treatment, care and support for HIV.

Members of the Ugandan government that are in favour of the bill have promoted the discourse that homosexuality is ?against god?s will? and that its acts are ?un-African?. This discourse, and the media attention surrounding it, has contributed to a crack down on homosexuality by other African governments including the arrest of several gay men and activists in Malawi.

As a continent, Africa is failing to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. In 2009 civil society from 14 African countries attended a workshop on human rights and HIV facilitated by the AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA). Of the 14 countries, almost two thirds have laws criminalising sex between men.

South Africa, one of the few countries in the region with legislation that promotes the rights of LGBTI individuals, continues to face rampant violations of these rights. African lesbian women have been particularly targeted in many communities and have been dual victims of gender based violence and hate crimes. A number of African lesbians have been targets of ?corrective rape?.

One of TAC?s campaigns has been to improve access to justice and health services to survivors of gender based violence and hate crimes. TAC will continue to advocate around ensuring that perpetrators of these acts are brought to justice through the legal system.

As well as increasing violent crimes, homophobia undermines public health measures. Men who have sex with men (MSM) are recognized as a high risk group for HIV transmission. Human rights violations and stigma around HIV and homosexuality reduce access to and uptake of HIV treatment, prevention and care.

For governments to sanction homophobia is not only morally deplorable, it is also counterproductive in the fight against HIV.

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Source URL (retrieved on *2016/12/06 - 9:47pm*): http://tac.org.za/community/node/2827