

Uganda May Drop Death Penalty, Life Imprisonment From Anti-Homosexuality Bill

✖ Uganda may remove the death penalty and life imprisonment from an anti-homosexuality bill that is expected to go before the nation's Parliament later this month.

According to Bloomberg, James Nsaba Buturo, Uganda's minister of ethics and integrity, said lawmakers plan to drop the controversial penalties in a revised version of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2009 that is to be presented to Parliament in two weeks.

Photo: A revised anti-homosexuality may be presented in Uganda's Parliament (shown) later this month.

The revisions are designed to draw the support of religious leaders who oppose the penalties, Buturo told Bloomberg Wednesday. He added that the bill would also promote counseling to help "attract errant people to acceptable sexual orientation."

The reported change comes amid mounting criticism from U.S. Christian leaders, who have denounced the bill as extreme.

In a statement released Thursday, Saddleback pastor Rick Warren urged Ugandan pastors to speak out against the proposed

measure, calling it
“unjust, extreme and un-Christian toward homosexuals.”

He said the bill would force pastors to report their conversations with homosexuals to authorities and would have a “chilling effect” on Ugandan compassion ministry.

“If this bill passed, homosexuals who are HIV positive will be reluctant to seek or receive care, comfort and compassion from our churches out of fear of being reported,” he said in a video message to Ugandan pastors. “You and I know that the churches of Uganda are the truly caring communities where people receive hope and help, not condemnation.”

In a Twitter message Thursday, Warren said his ministry’s “quiet effort” may have helped kill part of the Uganda bill, but
“our job isn’t done yet.”

The Ugandan government supports the measure, which was introduced in October, because it considers homosexuality

“repugnant to the Ugandan culture,” Buturo told Bloomberg. Under the current proposal, those convicted of homosexual behavior could face sentences up to life in prison and those who fail to report homosexual activity to authorities could be jailed for up to seven years. Individuals convicted of “aggravated homosexuality”—when the accused is HIV-positive, or engages in homosexual behavior with a disabled person or anyone under 18—could receive the death penalty.

Dozens of church leaders signed a statement released

Monday decrying the bill's treatment of homosexuals. Exodus International leaders have also denounced the proposed measure, saying it could hamper ministry to those seeking freedom from same-sex attraction.

A Facebook group called Speak Out Against Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009 has some 10,000 members.

Charismatic ministers associated with a teaching said to have motivated support for the bill among Ugandan church leaders have also criticized the law as an attempt to legislate morality.

Theologian C. Peter Wagner, who leads the International Coalition of Apostles, which affirms the view that Christians must influence the seven mountains of culture, including politics, said the anti-homosexuality bill is likely "misguided."

He said legislating morality is not feasible and that if Uganda wanted to legislate biblical principals, it would have to criminalize adultery and premarital sex also and not single out homosexuality.

"My position is that this is not a good way to do it," Wagner said. "To legislate against sexual orientation is probably crossing the line. It's like making a law whether parents can spank their children or not. It's much too much of a personal ethical issue. ... I would support raising up a national conscience against homosexuality and allowing the Holy Spirit to work

that way.”