

Uganda's Anti-Gay Bill Won't Contain Death Penalty

The Ugandan lawmaker who originally authored an **anti-gay bill** proposing death for some homosexual acts said Friday that a new version of the proposed legislation doesn't contain the death penalty.

Parliamentarian David Bahati said the bill, which is expected to be voted on next month, had "moved away from the death penalty after considering all the issues that have been raised."

"There is no death penalty," he told The Associated Press.

Bahati said the bill now focuses on protecting children from gay pornography, banning gay marriage, counseling gays, as well as punishing those who promote **gay culture**. Jail terms are prescribed for various offenses, he said, offering no details. The most recent version of the bill hasn't been publicly released.

In 2009, when Bahati first introduced the bill, he charged that homosexuals threatened **family values** in Uganda and that gays from the West were recruiting poor Ugandan children into gay lifestyles with promises of money and a better life. He said a tough new law was needed because a colonial-era law against sodomy was not strong enough.

The bill, popular among many in Uganda but condemned abroad, has been under scrutiny by a committee whose members now say they are ready to put it forward for a vote. One of the members, Krispus Ayena, said Friday that some parliamentarians spoke strongly against certain provisions in the bill as well as the death penalty itself.

"There was a dissenting voice in the committee," Ayena said.

“They argued very forcefully that we should not do a thing like that: to regulate what goes on in bedrooms. First of all, is it practicable to regulate that? And there are those who say this is very oppressive.”

The bill’s original wording proposed the death penalty for cases where HIV-infected homosexuals had sex, where gay people had sex with minors or the disabled, and where gays were discovered having sex for the second time. Bahati said at the time that these offenses amounted to what he called “aggravated homosexuality.”

The speaker of Uganda’s parliament recently said the bill would be passed before Christmas, renewing fears among activists who want it jettisoned. The bill has been condemned by some world leaders, including U.S. President Barack Obama, who has described it as “odious.” European countries such as Sweden and Norway have threatened to cut foreign aid to Uganda if the bill becomes law.

More than 445,000 people around the world have joined a campaign urging Citibank and Barclays to publicly condemn the bill. Both Citibank and Barclays have big operations in Uganda. The petition – perhaps mistakenly, according to the latest information from Bahati and Ayena – calls the legislation the “Kill the Gays” bill.

“As world banks and heavy players in Uganda, Citibank and Barclays have a unique responsibility to speak out and help stop this dangerous legislation before it becomes law,” said Citibank customer Collin Burton, who launched his campaign on . “Now, perhaps more than ever before, we need the international business community to step up and lead by the corporate values they tout on their websites. Human lives are counting on it.”

Ugandan gay activists, while condemning the bill, point out that it has somehow helped the struggle for equality by

pushing a once-taboo subject to the national agenda. This year Ugandan gays held their first pride parade.

Copyright 2012 The Associated Press.