

Uganda: Police close down gay rights workshop
Amnesty International
19 June 2012

Police have raided a human rights workshop attended by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists in Kampala, prompting Amnesty International to reiterate its call on the government to end its targeted harassment of people involved in lawful activities.

The workshop, which was organised by the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) to teach human rights monitoring skills to LGBT activists from Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya as well as Uganda, was closed down following the police action on Monday.

“This ludicrous and senseless harassment of human rights activists has no basis in law whatsoever and has to stop,” said Michelle Kagari, Amnesty International’s deputy director for Africa.

“The continued persecution of LGBT rights activists by the Ugandan authorities is beginning to take on the sinister characteristics of a witch hunt.”

The raid took place at 14.30 local time when a dozen police surrounded the hotel where the workshop was being held, and sealed the exits.

A pick up truck filled with police in full riot gear then pulled up outside preventing anyone from entering or leaving.

Many workshop participants, who had come from Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania, retreated to their hotel rooms but police checked the hotel register and then went door to door to round them up.

At around 17.00 three staff members from the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) who organised the workshop and three workshop participants were led to a waiting police bus.

After a meeting with senior police officials who admitted their response may have been “over zealous”, EHAHRDP were asked to present their official documents of registration at police headquarters the next day.

“We are seeing a worrying pattern emerging whereby the Ugandan authorities engage in arbitrary activities deliberately designed to intimidate and threaten legitimate human rights work,” said Kagari.

“The participants in this workshop had done absolutely nothing wrong and we call on the police to end this outrageous behaviour which makes a mockery of Uganda’s human rights obligations.”

LGBT people face discrimination and violence in Uganda. An Anti-Homosexuality Law which remains pending in Parliament risks further entrenching discrimination including by criminalising the “promotion” of homosexuality, as well as making it compulsory for all Ugandans to report knowledge of any LGBT person, or face three years’ jail. Continued harassment of human rights activists is an egregious violation of human rights law to which Uganda is a party.

On 14 February, Uganda’s Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Simon Lokodo, raided another LGBT rights workshop and attempted to order the arrest of Kasha Jacqueline Nabagasera, a prominent LGBT rights activist and winner of the 2011 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. She was forced to flee from the hotel.