



The Global Forum on MSM and HIV's Statement Condemning Arrests of Ugandan LGBT AIDS Activists

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The Global Forum on MSM and HIV¹ stands with Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), and HIV/AIDS activists around the world in condemning the arrests of three Ugandan LGBT activists and demands their immediate and unconditional release. Onziema Patience, Valentine Kalende, and Auf were arrested by the Ugandan Police Force at the 2008 HIV/AIDS Implementers' Meeting currently taking place in Kampala. The activists were peacefully protesting the remarks of a Ugandan government official which suggested that no funds be directed towards HIV programs targeting men who have sex with men (MSM). Their arrests now confirm what appears to be a growing and deeply disturbing pattern of homophobic actions taken by governmental officials in countries around the world, including Egypt, Gambia, Poland and Senegal.

The link between social oppression of sexual minorities and HIV is inextricable and well established by public health researchers. Discrimination, state-sanctioned violence, and economic disenfranchisement of sexual minorities cause social dislocation, influence transnational migration, and fuel human rights abuses, heightening the risk for HIV transmission. In many parts of the world, MSM remain the group most affected by HIV. Seroprevalence studies among MSM in Asia, Australia, Africa, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and North America yield higher than average estimates – in some places as high as 46 percent.

Even in countries without legal prohibitions against same-sex behavior, widespread stigma often prevents individuals belonging to sexual minority communities from

¹ The Global Forum on MSM and HIV (www.msmandhiv.org) is a network of civil society groups, AIDS and, MSM organizations working worldwide against HIV for the health and human rights of men who have sex with men.

seeking or receiving essential HIV prevention, care and treatment services. In fact, only 1 in 20 MSM worldwide has access to HIV prevention, care or treatment. In many countries, these services are grossly underfunded or absent altogether. This is unacceptable. Without appropriate health messages, support, and services, sexual minorities are at continued and elevated risk of HIV infection. This should remain a concern to all who are devoted to the eradication of HIV and AIDS.

The recent arrests of LGBT activists who were peacefully drawing attention to persistent, blatant disparities in HIV/AIDS funding can only be viewed as an affront to HIV prevention efforts and to the rights of LGBT and AIDS activists everywhere. Our Ugandan brothers and sisters who were wrongfully arrested must be released immediately, so that they might continue their participation at the 2008 HIV/AIDS Implementers' Meeting and we might collectively get on with the business of fighting HIV and AIDS.