



Turning the Tide of HIV & AIDS in Africa
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Civil rights movement intensifies as hate crimes increase in LGBTQ communities in Africa

Toronto – Sept. 10, 2019 – Recently, in Uganda, police with machine guns raided the offices of a human rights group. Pepe Julian Onziema, a director with Sexual Minorities Uganda, one of the organizations in the room, remained calm as police locked the doors and threatened people inside. He'd already been arrested for talking about the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities, so he knew what to expect.

A spike in hate crimes and resurgence of anti-LGBTQ laws in Uganda and other countries have made life terrifying, but in spite of assaults and death threats, Onziema continues to live openly as a transman, and his colleagues continue to advocate against anti-LGBTQ laws that endanger their lives. They're part of a pan-African civil rights movement.

As he told John Oliver during a widely seen interview on *Last Week Tonight*, "I look over my shoulder every day, but there's no place I'd rather be – to make sure that the safety I need happens in the country."

When police finally left, Onziema and his colleagues went public, rallying support around the world, detailing what people could do to help those who had been arrested or forced to flee. The Stephen Lewis Foundation, which works with African grassroots organizations, helped his network to spread the news during that traumatic week.

This month, in a call to action, Onziema is in Canada to talk about how Canadians can help. His group is one of 16 organizations that's part of the Foundation's *LGBTQ Africa Initiative*, which improved the lives of 31,000 people in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo last year alone.

"We're calling on all people who care about human rights and social justice," he said. "Please pay attention to what's happening. Across Africa, we're standing up to discrimination. We're demanding access to stigma-free health services, including HIV prevention and testing. We're asking for discrimination-free education and employment. We're asking for harassment-free housing opportunities – and for legal rights, especially the repeal of anti-LGBTQ legislation."

His organization trains staff to troubleshoot life-threatening situations at work and on the streets in Uganda. Like-minded organizations in Kenya and Tanzania have trained thousands of people, teaching them about human rights, media campaigns and safe, stigma-free locations for healthcare and HIV testing and counselling. These organizations are saving people's lives in LGBTQ communities across sub-Saharan Africa, in spite of harassment and threats.

"All the intimidation hasn't fazed us," Onziema said.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation works with organizations that provide support to women, orphaned children, grandmothers and people living with HIV & AIDS. As part of its LGBTQ Africa Initiative, it supports 16 organizations that improved the lives of 31,000 members of LGBTQ communities last year.

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