



## **LGBTIQ organizations in Africa reporting human rights abuses linked to COVID-19**

*Stephen Lewis Foundation puts out urgent call for support for LGBTIQ partners working to ensure access to healthcare and HIV medications in the midst of increased violence and discrimination.*

Toronto, ON – (May 19, 2020) – LGBTIQ organizations in eastern and central Africa are reporting a surge in violence and discrimination linked to the COVID-19 pandemic which is threatening the safety and health of LGBTIQ individuals. On International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, and leading into Pride Month, the Stephen Lewis Foundation has launched its Partners in Pride campaign, urgently calling on Canadians to support its African LGBTIQ partners to continue their life-saving work, particularly at this critical moment.

“We’re receiving numerous reports of police using social distancing restrictions to justify raids on LGBTIQ shelters and general community violence directed at LGBTIQ individuals,” says Meg French, Executive Director of the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF). “One of our partner organizations, in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko (RSM), reported that six transgender people were physically assaulted as they shopped for food at a market because vendors and other customers believed LGBTIQ communities were to blame for COVID-19.”

Minority Womyn in Action (MWA), in Kenya, reports, “In the past month alone, MWA has responded to two cases of lesbians kicked out of home into homelessness, and one queer woman being stabbed by a family member because of her sexual orientation. COVID-19 ‘stay safe at home’ measures mean that most LGBTIQ folk have to share spaces with transphobic and homophobic family and are stuck in dangerous living conditions.”

As countries across the African continent respond to COVID-19, the SLF calls on individuals, corporations, governments, and religious leaders everywhere to condemn violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ communities in the context of the new pandemic.

Health Options for Young Men on HIV, AIDS & STIs (HOYMAS), an LGBTIQ organization in Kenya, shares: “The COVID-19 response is having a huge impact on the health and well-being of millions of LGBTIQ persons and sex workers affected by HIV and AIDS. In particular, lockdowns are making it much harder to deliver the essential services they rely on to survive and thrive. We must now use our 10 years of experience in the fight against HIV to help shape the response to COVID-19. We've learned that a holistic approach is essential. Medical support must be complemented with broader social and economic supports so that vulnerable community members can access our services.”

The Stephen Lewis Foundation has supported LGBTIQ organizations in central and eastern Africa for the past three years and had planned this month to launch Partners in Pride, a global campaign to expand this support and to champion health and human rights for LGBTIQ communities in Africa. With its partners reaching out with stories of increased violence and abuse, the Foundation’s campaign will be filling a very immediate need.

[www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride)





“There is an urgent need to support drastically underfunded LGBTIQ organizations in sub-Saharan Africa, immediately in the context of COVID-19, and moving forward,” adds French. “They support marginalized communities unlikely to be reached by mainstream organizations, advocate for human rights, and provide access to healthcare for people living with HIV. This critical work is why we are launching Partners in Pride.”

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## Note to Editors

### About Partners in Pride

Partners in Pride champions health and human rights for LGBTIQ communities in Africa and provides a way for Canadians and the global community to support LGBTIQ organizations in central and east Africa. To address immediate challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Partners in Pride is launching an emergency response fund to raise \$200,000. To sustain and strengthen community-based LGBTIQ networks in Africa, and increase their reach, Partners in Pride aims to raise \$3 million over the next three years. To launch Partners in Pride, the Stephen Lewis Foundation is pleased to have received the generous pro-bono support of the Toronto-based communications firm, Navigator. [www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride)

### About the Stephen Lewis Foundation

The Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) works with community-level organizations, which are turning the tide of HIV and AIDS in Africa by providing care and support to women, orphaned children, LGBTIQ communities, grandmothers and people living with HIV and AIDS. Since 2003, the SLF has funded over 1800 initiatives, partnering with more than 325 community-based organizations in the 15 African countries hardest hit by the global AIDS pandemic. [www.stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org)

**To request photos or interviews with contacts from LGBTIQ organizations in Africa, or the Stephen Lewis Foundation, or for more information, please contact:**

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