

New Ugandan law criminalizing LGBTIQ lives points to rising human rights violations during COVID-19 pandemic

Toronto, ON – (May 19, 2021) – **On Monday, the Ugandan government passed Sexual Offences Bill 2019, criminalizing same-sex sexual relations.** Sexual Minorities Uganda has [released a statement](#) calling for support and solidarity. Globally, human rights violations are on the rise against LGBTIQ communities, and those affected by HIV and AIDS across East Africa are under ever-increasing threats to their health and safety.

LGBTIQ organizations in Uganda are reporting that they are fielding hundreds of phone calls from frightened community members, and that some are attempting to flee for their safety, driven by the threat of another surge in homophobic violence, police raids and arrests, exacerbated by the passing of the Bill. Staff of these organizations have shared with us that they are concerned about their own safety and the security of their organizations, which are a lifeline for their communities.

In brief, the safety of LGBTIQ communities is under threat:

- **Stigma and discrimination against LGBTIQ communities across East Africa is creating dangerous and barriers to healthcare, with critical implications for HIV prevention, testing and treatment.**
 - Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG) [reports](#) that lockdowns limit access to non-discriminatory health services for LBQ women. Some medical staff have attempted to ‘out’ individuals or intentionally provide inadequate care.
 - Health Options for Young Men on HIV, AIDS & STIs, 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 services they rely on to survive and thrive.”
 - A 4.7-times higher risk of newly acquiring HIV is associated with severe criminal penalties for same-sex sexual relations according to a recent report by the UN Secretary-General, [Addressing inequalities and getting back on track to end AIDS by 2030](#). Inequalities – including those based on gender and sexual orientation – are the key reason 2020 global targets for the response to AIDS were missed.
- **LGBTIQ communities affected by HIV and AIDS across East Africa are facing a spike in human rights violations and growing threats to their personal safety.**
 - COVID-19 lockdowns, curfews and policies continue to be abused to justify human rights violations against LGBTIQ individuals and communities, including police raids, beatings, homophobic rape, evictions and harassment.
 - An SLF partner in Kenya shared: “‘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.”





- o Violent attacks committed by people who believe LGBTIQ communities are to blame for COVID-19 have been reported by multiple LGBTIQ organizations, including Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko, in Democratic Republic of Congo, and FARUG, in Uganda.

Global solidarity is needed to address the inequalities and inequities that drive pandemics, and ensure LGBTIQ organizations have funding and support to meet their communities' increasing needs, protect their organization and staff, and mobilize to defend human rights.

###

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. 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

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

Beth Bowers

Senior Manager, Media and Communications

Stephen Lewis Foundation

bbowers@stephenlewisfoundation.org

www.stephenlewisfoundation.org

www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride

www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride

