



REFUGEE LAW PROJECT



FIDA UGANDA



Centre for Women in
Governance (CEWIG)



Raising
Voices
African Sex workers
Alliance (ASWA)

Uganda Harmonised
Rights Alliance (UHRA)

Uganda Health
and Science Press
Association (UHSPA)

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Civil Society Movement in Uganda Protests Ugandan Government Ban of Sex Worker Rights Meeting Kampala, Uganda, November 19, 2010

From November 18-20th, 2010, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) was scheduled to host an African Women's Leadership Institute for sex worker rights activists in East Africa at the Lake Victoria Serena Resort, in Lweza, Uganda. The workshop was aimed at addressing the leadership needs, health and reproductive rights and abuses faced by sex workers in the region. On November 17th, 2010, Dr. James Nsaba Buturo—the Minister of State for Ethics and Integrity—issued a directive to the hotel stating that hosting the meeting would amount to “promoting and defending a criminal act,” and that the hotel would be considered “an accomplice in an illegality” should the meeting go ahead. On November 18th the hotel responded to the directive by canceling AMwA's booking and asking the participants to leave their premises. This is the second time that Dr. Buturo is misusing state power to deny sex worker rights activists the opportunity to organize and freely express themselves, having banned a similar meeting in March 2008. Human Rights Organisations recognize that the law in Uganda criminalizes the act of prostitution. However, that fact does not take away any other rights that sex workers as citizens of this country enjoy. Neither does it prohibit non-sex workers from discussing the issue.

The Civil Society Movement is of the considered view that these actions are a direct violation of the fundamental human right of every Ugandan to assemble freely, to receive information, to enjoy equal protection of the law, as well as the right to be treated with equality and non-discrimination. More importantly, the Minister's actions violate the right to freedom of expression as well as the Right to Health, both of which are guaranteed under the 1995 Constitution, the Equal Opportunities Commission Act, African Union obligations, and various international laws and commitments. We are especially concerned that the Minister's action is not in conformity with Uganda's National HIV/AIDS National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2007/8 – 2011/12, the National Performance Measurement and Management Plan, Operational Handbook to the HSSPIII, and the National Strategic Plan (National Strategic Framework) for HIV/AIDS Activities in Uganda, all of which recognize the need to address the situation of sex workers. As Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, AMwA's Executive Director, points out: “From a Human Rights Perspective we ought to be concerned about this incident because it means that a government minister can unilaterally ban

any convening that he wishes to, regardless of the provisions of the Constitution of Uganda.”

The Civil Society Movement therefore demands that the Government of Uganda:

- Recognizes and upholds the rights of all individuals and groups to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Ensures that an immediate end is effected to abuses of state power by Government officials, and disassociates itself from the illegal and unconstitutional actions of Hon. Buturo;
- Ensures that sex workers in Uganda are fully protected; and,
- Decriminalizes sex work.

For further information please contact:

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