



I G L H R C

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
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## PRESS CLIPS

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### Report shows grim gay existence in Nigeria

By [PinkNews.co.uk](http://PinkNews.co.uk) writer

Nigerian LGBT people opposed to a new anti-gay law in the country have spoken about their experiences in a report for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC).

*Voices from Nigeria* details homophobic attacks, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and increased levels of homophobia that have already begun as a result of the introduction of the legislation, referred to as the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act.

Introduced to the Nigerian National Assembly in January 2006, the Act launches a vigorous attack on freedom of expression, assembly, and association in Africa's most populous nation.

If passed, the law would create criminal penalties for engaging in same-sex marriages or relationships and for advocating for the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people.

Simply taking part in a gay or lesbian club or support group would be illegal.

Not only would gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals be targeted not for specific acts but for existing, heterosexual people who "promote" their lifestyle, for example by selling them a house, would also be penalised.

Public hearings on the bill were held last week by a committee of Nigeria's National Assembly and it could be voted into law as early as next month.

With elections for the Presidency, Senate and House of Representatives in April, gay rights activists fear that politicians will put populism above human rights.

At the House committee hearing it emerged that over 100 petitions had been received objecting to the proposed new law, which would be one of the most draconian ever considered anywhere in the

world.

"Ultimately, it is the lives of LGBT Nigerians that will be affected by this law," said Cary Alan Johnson, IGLHRC's Senior Specialist for Africa.

"The report is meant to turn up the volume of those voices."

One of those interviewed for the IGLHRC report is an HIV outreach worker named Chuma, who was arrested and detained by the police in Lagos in 2006 while carrying out research for a study on the prevalence and risk factors of HIV/AIDS among men that have sex with men.

According to Chuma: "A team of policemen in Lagos came to my apartment and took me away to an unknown place for two days.

"I was beaten beyond recognition, and I am still receiving treatment for the head injury I received.

"I was dehumanised and paraded naked to the press... My only offence was that I am gay."

Chuma was eventually released without being charged or tried.

Sarah, a Nigerian sexual rights activist, believes that many Nigerians are acting as if the legislation has already been passed.

She cites attacks on gay men in Abuja, the capital city, and the expulsion of cadets from a national military academy.

During the hearings, officials in the Nigerian president's office claimed that passage of the bill would help to fight HIV.

Aishat, a gay Nigerian man interviewed for the report argues however that:

"The Bill will force to people having sex in secret rather than stopping gays having sex.

"Condoms will be used less and less often because there will be no time to develop relationships because of fear of being caught."

In releasing the report, IGLHRC has called on the Nigerian authorities to remember their commitments to International Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights (ICCPR) that guarantees freedom from unfair discrimination and the right to privacy.

Provisions of the Act are also inconsistent with the principle of non- discrimination found in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Nigerian Constitution.

**The report is available on line at [http://www.iglhrc.org/files/iglhrc/reports/Voices\\_Nigeria.pdf](http://www.iglhrc.org/files/iglhrc/reports/Voices_Nigeria.pdf).**



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Gay City News  
November 2, 2006

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### U.N. Condemns Cameroon Jailings

By Doug Ireland

The Republic of Cameroon received a stinging rebuke from the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on October 10 for having kept 11 men imprisoned for over a year on charges of homosexuality.

Yet, the news of this condemnation by a U.N. body has been the subject of a total media blackout in the West African nation of 18 million people, formed decades ago from the merger of former French and British colonies.

"To my knowledge, none of the Cameroon media have spoken of this U.N. action, and the government has not officially reacted to the condemnation," Charles Guebogo, a 27-year-old sociologist, told Gay City News by e-mail from Cameroon. Guebogo is the author of "La Question Homosexuelle en Afrique: Le Cas de Cameroun," just published last week in Paris by Editions L'Harmattan. "And if the government has responded directly to the U.N., the response has not been made public," Guebogo added.

In its finding, the U.N. Working Group found that the detention of the 11 men in Cameroon on the basis of their presumed sexual orientation constitutes "an arbitrary deprivation of liberty" contrary to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The men had been arrested in a 2005 raid on a gay bar in the country's capital, Yaoundé. The U.N. Working Group's ruling came in response to a complaint brought by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) on behalf of the men.

After nearly a year languishing in prison, the men were finally brought to trial in June 2006, and nine

of them were found guilty of "sodomy" and sentenced to 10-month jail terms. One of the men, Alim Mongoche, died of AIDS-related complications shortly after his conviction; his poor health was exacerbated by the harsh conditions of his imprisonment.

Homosexuality is a crime in Cameroon, punishable by up to five years in prison.

"There are raids on gay places like the one that ensnared the 11 men from time to time, particularly in the large cities like Yaoundé and Douala," Guebogo said, "but these raids are not 'officially' targeting gays and lesbians. When you're arrested, if the police decide that you are homosexual, you are harassed and abused unbearably, and you won't be released unless you have enough money to pay them a substantial bribe-if you don't, you're hauled into court. In these spot-check raids, the police will grab everybody, and then sort out those they conclude are homosexual by the way they dress, how they speak, in other words on the basis of how effeminate you are."

Guebogo told Gay City News that in Cameroon, "the gay community is forced to live clandestinely at every level. There are a few gay meeting places, bars, and clubs, in the large cities that were the sites of my two years of research for my book, but they have no permission to exist from the authorities."

A number of those bars closed right after the arrest of the 11 men, but some subsequently re-opened.

Violent gay-bashing "is common in Cameroon," Guebogo added. "This can be the work of a jealous neighbor, or of a band of youths-the violence is especially rough if gays are surprised making love

in a public place, or even sometimes in their homes."

But raids are not the only anti-homosexual persecutions in Cameroon. Joel Gustave Nana, a 24-year-old Cameroonian gay activist, told Gay City News of another horrific incident.

"On March 12 this year, 12 girls were expelled from a private secondary school in Cameroon for being lesbians," Nana told Gay City News from South Africa, where he is working on a fellowship for the African gay and lesbian news Web site Behind the Mask (<http://www.mask.org.za/>) "One girl's father threw her out of his house, and she found refuge at her grandmother's until her grandmother decided to file a complaint against a female football player (who lived near the school) for misleading her granddaughter" into homosexuality, Nana added.

But, said Nana, "The policemen instead arrested the daughter, and forced her to give the names of other girls who were lesbians. She gave two names-two students- who were expelled. All these girls were also arrested and jailed in the New Bell prison on March 30, were judged on June 8, and sentenced to three years probation under penalty of six months in jail if they are caught or suspected of 'practicing lesbianism.'" The students were also required to pay a hefty fine.

Nana is one of the co-founders of Alternatives Cameroun, a human rights group launched in April to work for Cameroon's besieged gay community. To prevent government persecution or interdiction, says Nana, "Alternatives Cameroun bills itself as a human rights organization for legal purposes, but is working for and with LGBT people in Cameroon."

Nana says the fledgling group, which now has some 26 members, was started in part because of a media campaign of homo-hate earlier this year that involved publishing the names of scores of alleged homosexuals.

The anti-gay media witch-hunt began in early January of this year. A February 2 article on the Web site of Radio France Internationale (RFI) by Valentin Zinga-the French public radio network's correspondent in Yaoundé-related: "For three weeks, the big cities in Cameroon have been living to the rhythm of 'revelations' on homosexuality. In the beginning, the campaign was launched by La Météo, under the headline, 'HOMOSEXUALITY AT THE SUMMIT OF THE STATE.' Then it was

Nouvelle Afrique's turn to publish 'a list of queers.' Next, it was L'Anecdote which bannered the revelation of 'THE TOP 50 PRESUMED HOMOSEXUALS OF CAMEROUN,' which it followed up again in future editions with more names. Among those named as homosexual were prominent state officials and bureaucrats, business executives, and musicians-even dead people. They were only lists of names, with no established facts."

One of those named in the media outing campaign was Gregoire Owona, executive minister in the office of Cameroon's president and the secretary-general of the party in power, the RDPC (Rassemblement Democratique du peuple camerounais). The RFI correspondent reported that the media outing campaign was in part the result of political manipulation, noting that, "The aggressiveness of a number of publications on this subject, replete with their accusations without any back-up, can be interpreted as settling of scores among some of the regime's Big Fish, in an ambiance created by an expected re-shuffle of the government's ministerial appointments."

The anti-gay witch-hunt was encouraged by Monsignor Victor Tonyè Bako, the country's Catholic archbishop (some 40 percent of Cameroon's people are Catholic). As the media's hate-filled outing campaign intensified, the archbishop delivered a sermon in Yaoundé's cathedral, Notre-dame des Victoires de Yaoundé, in which he painted a picture of a vast homosexual conspiracy.

"In the name of allocating a job, in the name of getting a promotion, in the name of getting entrance into a good school, people are trying to impose homosexuality on young people as the path to success, or as the condition of admission to certain examinations and competitions," Archbishop Bako thundered.

The prelate went on to claim hysterically that, "in certain scholastic establishments, classes are taught to children to make them accept and tolerate homosexuality." The archbishop's sermon was distributed in written form, then reprinted as a brochure and sold, becoming a best-seller.

It was in this dire context that Alternatives Cameroun was founded.

"We realized that the major problem in Cameroon is ignorance," Nana told Gay City News, adding that

"heterosexuals are ignorant of LGBT issues, and still associate them with witchcraft or just as a means to become wealthy," as the archbishop had charged.

Moreover, said Nana, "men who had sex with men did not know that someone can contract HIV through anal intercourse. To tackle those issues we organize group and individual counseling, write articles that we manage to publish, distribute condoms, and teach the people how and why they should use them."

AIDS education is urgent because, Nana related, "we are sidelined and ignored, and the reason for this is the fact that homosexuality is prohibited by law."

Alternatives Cameroun also "does some advocacy, helps those of ours who are in jail by raising funds to find a lawyer to defend them, providing them with basic necessities and, most importantly, visiting them," Nana said. Prison visits to gay prisoners are especially critical because of the abuse to which gay people are subjected there.

Nana underscored the widespread police persecution of gays by relating a recent incident, "when a young man went to the police to file a complaint against another one for stealing his cell phone. But when the second young man accused of the theft said that both of them were gay, they were both arrested and jailed."

Nana told Gay City News, "I have been a gay activist for seven years now. I knew I was gay when

I was 14, and I've been out to my family since I am 17 and publicly since I am 18. My family's reaction was the worst ever. They understood that I could be gay but totally disowned me when I became an activist."

Nana recounted that he "began working with a gay association in Cameroon called AGALES from 1999 until 2001, when the board members dissolved it because they were too afraid to continue. I continued and was working on my own, educating the community, doing some counseling and sometimes writing to the press about some articles they wrote denigrating LGBT people. That cost me exile in 2004."

Then, Nana continued, "I went to Nigeria, where I founded

Mygaypal.com, an African LGBT advocacy Web site, but due to the fact that I was working alone and had no resources, I ended up closing it because there was no money to continue. From Nigeria I heard of the arrest of the 11 men, so I organized communication and help for them, I helped them as I could until I went back to Cameroon in February 2005."

Two months later, with two gay friends he'd previously known, he co-founded Alternatives Cameroun.

To those in his native country who claim that homosexuality is a foreign import and part of the bad colonial heritage, Nana replied: "Homosexuality is not a colonial heritage. The only evil that is part of the colonial heritage is homophobia and hatred."



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Gay City News  
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## PRESS CLIPS

### Striking at Basic Expression

*By Doug Ireland*

One of the most sweeping anti-gay bills ever introduced in any parliament in the world is in danger of rapid passage in Nigeria in the coming weeks. Although billed as a ban on same-sex marriage, the proposed law includes provisions that would make any expression of homosexuality - not only sexual conduct but any homosexual inclination or reference - in public or in private, a crime.

This draconian, far-reaching piece of homophobic legislation provoked a full-throated outcry from the globe's entire human rights community when it was introduced last year, and for a while it had been dormant. But now the bill has been fast-tracked for speedy passage in advance of Nigeria's national elections in April, and the BBC's correspondent in the country's capital of Abuja reported last week that "it is likely to be passed by both chambers of the Nigerian National Assembly by the end of March."

Homosexual conduct among consenting adults in Nigeria is already a crime punishable by 14 years in prison, a 19th century penal provision that is a legacy of British colonial rule. But the new legislation goes much, much further in terms of curbing fundamental rights of expression, association, and communication. Among the proposed new law's many noxious provisions, it would, under penalty of a stiff prison term of five years:

- outlaw membership in a gay group, attending a gay meeting or protest, donating money to a gay organization, or even advocating gay equality in any way, shape, or form;
- outlaw hosting or even visiting a gay Web site;

- outlaw expressions of same-sex love in letters or e-mails;
- outlaw attending a same-sex marriage or blessing ceremony, screening or watching a gay movie, taking or possessing photos of a gay couple, and publishing, selling, or loaning a gay book or video.

Even mere socializing by two or more gay people, like having dinner together, is likely to be interpreted as illegal.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals would be targeted not only for specific acts but also for simply existing under this proposed law, and even heterosexual people who "promote" the lifestyle of homosexuals, for example by selling them a house, would be criminalized.

"It's critical that the Nigerian government understand that this is not an issue of liberalism or Western cultural encroachment, but that this new law violates the most basic of freedoms," **Cary Alan Johnson**, senior specialist for Africa at the **International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)** told Gay City News.

And, added Johnson, "Nigeria is battling for a place as a leader of the Global South and the world as a whole. Passing the bill into law would seriously jeopardize any claims to leadership by showing that basic human freedoms are still not available in Nigeria."

Islamic Sharia law, which makes homosexuality punishable by stoning, has been imposed in 12 of the 36 states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria - all of which have Muslim majorities and are located in

the north of the country.

And now the nation's term-limited authoritarian president for the last eight years, General Olusegun Obasanjo - having been denied a third term when the National Assembly, disgusted at his regime's high-handed corruption, refused him a constitutional amendment allowing him to stay in office - has bypassed the primaries of his ruling People's Democratic Party. He has hand-picked as his successor the governor of one of those Sharia states, Umaru Yar'Adua, known as a strict advocate of the Islamic legal code.

Obasanjo, a favorite of President George W. Bush, has been accused by opposition parties of trying to rig the April elections in favor of Yar'Adua, who is expected to be an enthusiastic enforcer of the proposed new anti-gay law if, as seems likely, he is elected.

Last week, an MD who is Obasanjo's assistant on health issues, argued that the new anti-gay law was needed to prevent HIV/AIDS - by keeping gays from infecting their wives and children - and he also bizarrely asserted it would help in preventing breast and womb cancer, to which he claimed lesbians are particularly vulnerable, and in preventing depression and suicide.

In fact, UNAIDS and other AIDS-fighting organizations have roundly condemned the proposed new law, saying it would encourage the spread of AIDS by driving at-risk populations, including men who have sex with men, underground and invisible to prevention workers.

And depression and suicide among same-sexers would undoubtedly be increased by the psychological ravages of the repressive bill, not decreased.

The national bodies representing Christians and Muslims, however, are both strong supporters of the bill.

Representatives of a broad civil society coalition opposed to the proposed law - including LGBT advocates - were initially denied entry to a so-called "public" hearing on the bill last week on the grounds that it was "by invitation only." But after intervention by representatives of the European Union and foreign embassies, the bill's opponents were able to pass through the National Assembly's gates and get to the hearing, according to reports from Nigerian

gay activists received by Human Rights Watch.

"There has been an absolutely amazing coalition of Nigerian LGBT and mainstream human rights activists who have come together under the banner of basic human freedoms" to oppose this bill, IGLHRC's Johnson told Gay City News, adding, "It is really a watershed moment in LGBT history in Africa."

The dangers of the proposed law for the fight against AIDS, and its crushing effects on already-beleaguered Nigerian gays, were underscored dramatically in a new report issued February 17 by IGLHRC, and entitled, "*Voices from Nigeria: Gays Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgenders Speak Out Against the Same-Sex Bill.*"

For example, a 37-year-old gay man named Chuma told IGLHRC, "I have been targeted myself because I am gay. Two months ago I was arrested and detained by the police in Lagos. This happened when I was carrying out research for the study on the prevalence and risk factors of HIV/AIDS, STD infections, and social risk behavior among men that have sex with men in Nigeria. A team of policemen in Lagos came to my apartment and took me away to an unknown place for two days. I was beaten beyond recognition, and I am still receiving treatment for the head injury I received. I was dehumanized and paraded naked to the press. My money, ID card, and shoes were taken. Eventually I was released without being charged or tried. My only offense was that I am gay."

"On another occasion," Chuma continued, "when I was at a gay bar, police came and arrested everyone there. Twenty-three people, including myself, were kept in detention for two days without a trial. I am concerned that the same-sex bill proposed by the Nigerian government will further force gays underground. Hate campaigns against GLBT people will increase and fundamental freedoms will be challenged. The laws will also affect Nigerians more broadly. HIV/AIDS will increase because visible support for GLBT organizations will vanish. Unemployment will increase. GLBT-friendly lawyers will refuse to defend gays for fear of persecution."

The entire, must-read "Voices from Nigeria" report is available online at:  
[http://www.iglhrc.org/files/iglhrc/reports/Voices\\_Nigeria.pdf](http://www.iglhrc.org/files/iglhrc/reports/Voices_Nigeria.pdf).

One report last week from a leader of the LGBT-

civil society opposition to the bill suggested that the Nigerian National Assembly is divided on its passage at the moment, with one-third for, one-third against, and one-third undecided. And IGLHRC's Johnson told Gay City News, "There is still time to prevent the passage of this bill."

Asked by this reporter what U.S. gays could do to help, Johnson said: "While Barney Frank and

Tammy Baldwin have both weighed in against the bill, Americans still need to put pressure on their representatives to condemn the bill. Your readers should call their members of Congress and the State Department and ask them to speak out against the Same-Sex Marriage Act. Full-scale activism is what is needed at this point."