



I G L H R C

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PRESS RELEASE

IGLHRC's New Study Reveals How Anti-Gay Discrimination Fuels HIV/AIDS Crisis in Africa

Shocking testimony on how medical staff humiliated an HIV positive gay patient:
"He died in part, I think, because he had no place to go."

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(New York, NY, March 1, 2007) –The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) today published a new study, *Off the Map*, which for the first time reveals how African governments and the global HIV/AIDS policy and funding community is denying basic human rights to same-sex practicing people in Africa. The report documents some shocking examples of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are denied access to effective HIV prevention, counseling and testing, treatment, and care.

Off the Map is the result of a year-long research project conducted through interviews with leaders of African lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations, international aid officials, HIV/AIDS project managers, and health care providers. The study also takes advantage of existing scholarly works in this area, and policy documents produced by international agencies and government bureaus. The report highlights the fact that,

"Africa, a continent with slightly more than ten percent of the world's population, is home to 60 percent, or more than 25 million people, of those living with HIV... [the disease] is having a decidedly harsh effect on same-sex practicing people. But nearly a quarter of a century into the epidemic, there is a wall of silence that surrounds AIDS and same-sex practices that may prove to be a significant obstacle to conquering the disease."

Multiple testimonies in the report demonstrate how homophobia limits the access of African gays to HIV/AIDS programs. K.S., a 23-year-old gay man in Mombasa, Kenya reported that he was chased out of a public health clinic when he asked to be examined for an anal STI. Romeo Tshuma, a Zimbabwean human rights activist, remembers accompanying a gay friend to a health care center in Harare to seek treatment for HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI), where, "the nurses were not helpful.... They embarrassed him, after that he wouldn't go to a hospital because of the embarrassment. He died in part, I think, because he had no place to go."

Cary Alan Johnson, IGLHRC's Senior Specialist for Africa and the author of the reports believes that the widespread denial of homosexuality in Africa contributes to human rights violations against African LGBT and increases the HIV vulnerabilities of gay people, "Homophobic stigma, the denial of homosexuality, and legislation that criminalizes same-sex behavior, all serve to push the issue of same-sex HIV transmission further underground, and drastically limit HIV services."

IGLHRC's new publication calls for specific actions by the U.S. government and other major international donors, international AIDS service organizations, private volunteer groups, and national and local African authorities to improve the access of LGBT in Africa to HIV prevention, treatment, and care services.

IGLHRC plans to use the findings of this report to push for a more comprehensive and equitable solution for the HIV crisis in Africa. "*Off the Map* offers specific solutions to address the roots of failure of HIV policies in Africa," said Paula Ettelbrick, Executive Director of IGLHRC. "In the next few months, we will work with our domestic and international partners to educate policy makers on the devastating impact of their HIV programs on the LGBT population in Africa. We hope that they will take steps to correct the injustice against African LGBT people affected by HIV."

To mark the official launch of the report, IGLHRC will be hosting an expert panel in New York City. Co-sponsored by Gay Men's Health Crisis, Gay Men of African Descent, and New York State Black Gay Network, the event will be held at The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center on March 1, 2007, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. More details on this event are available on IGLHRC's website.

The preface to the 124-page report was written by South African Supreme Court Justice Edwin Cameron. The report is available in a digital PDF version and in hard copy. For more information about this book and how to receive a copy, please visit IGLHRC's website (www.iglhrc.org)

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The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) is a leading human rights organization solely devoted to improving the rights of people around the world who are targeted for imprisonment, abuse or death because of their sexuality, gender identity or HIV/AIDS status. IGLHRC addresses human rights violations by partnering with and supporting activists in countries around the world, monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, engaging offending governments, and educating international human rights officials. A non-profit, non-governmental organization, IGLHRC is based in New York, with offices in San Francisco and Buenos Aires. Visit <http://www.iglhrc.org> for more information.