

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2009 7:51 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: voanews.com: Africa's Anti-Gay Laws Spark Accusations and Denials in US

I think this is a good idea – what do you think?

cdm

From: Richard Socarides [mailto:]
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2009 7:50 AM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: voanews.com: Africa's Anti-Gay Laws Spark Accusations and Denials in US

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There is a lot of appreciation for everything the Dept has done around this so far and I think you could really build on it by putting someone there in charge of international LGBT human rights issues.

Africa's Anti-Gay Laws Spark Accusations and Denials in US

Nico Colomant | Washington 21 December 2009

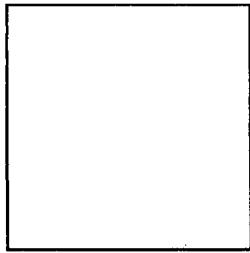


Photo: AP

Evangelical pastor Rick Warren, 23 Jun 2009

Anti-gay laws sweeping through East Africa have sparked a debate in the United States about the possible influence of American evangelical leaders and lawmakers with strong ties in that region. U.S. activists are also shedding new light on the risks that gays face in East Africa.

In his book called *The Family*, American journalist Jeff Sharlet criticizes a group of influential American Christian leaders and conservative lawmakers with close ties to politicians in East Africa.

He accuses them of treating some of the countries they deal with as social and political experiments.

"It has become sort of a Frankenstein's monster and is the family going to take responsibility for the empowerment they have given to some of these politicians?", asked Jeff Sharlet.

In his book, Sharlet specifically refers to politicians in Uganda proposing an anti-gay law that would criminalize homosexuality. The law, which could be passed within weeks despite international condemnation, includes possible punishment by death.

Anti-gay laws were recently passed in Burundi, are being discussed in Rwanda, and could soon be expanded in Kenya and Tanzania.

The American group Sharlet calls *The Family* is also known as The Fellowship. It organizes an annual National Prayer Breakfast with the U.S. president and foreign guests, but besides that activity shuns publicity and does not openly list its members.

But Sharlet says more American reporters are looking into the group and its alleged ties to Africa. These include helping African politicians with money so they can push socially conservative agendas.

"We see reporters in Iowa, in Pennsylvania, and in Oklahoma, going to their elected representatives who have a link to this whole thing and saying 'tell us about the link'," he said. "They are not accusing them of anything, they are saying, 'You have a relationship with the Ugandan government, what is the nature of that relationship? And, are you going to use that influence to oppose this legislation that seems to be supported by some of your allies?'"

Religious leaders like Rick Warren have also been under the microscope. He is the senior pastor of the California-based Saddleback church, which is active in both Uganda and Rwanda.

After being questioned about his role by U.S. media, Warren issued a video message on the Internet, denying his support for the law in Uganda.

"As an American pastor, it is not my role to interfere with the politics of other nations, but it is my role to speak out on moral issues and it is my role to shepherd other pastors who look to me for guidance, and it is my role to correct lies and errors and false reports when others associate my name with a law that I had nothing to do with, [and which] I completely oppose and I vigorously condemn," said Rick Warren. "I am referring to the pending law under consideration by the Ugandan parliament, known as the Anti-Homosexuality Bill."

Rwanda's parliament is also working to pass a law which would criminalize homosexuality but Warren has yet to address his church's role in that matter. In 2005, he called Rwanda a "purpose driven nation." Warren went with dozens of American evangelicals to hold meetings with government ministers, lawmakers and donate materials to churches across Rwanda.

Several American lawmakers who have been linked to the Fellowship, like Nevada Senator John Ensign have called the Ugandan law proposal "outrageous". But others like Kansas Senator Sam Brownback, who went to Uganda in 2004, have said they do not know enough about the bill to comment.

The executive director of the U.S.-based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, Cary Alan Johnson, welcomes some of the questions now being asked.

"It is a debate that has to happen and we are glad it is happening," said Cary Alan Johnson. "Rwanda and Uganda are both countries with deeply spiritual people and as of late we have understood that some of the more conservative elements in the United States have been funding the most violent and homophobic discourses about homosexuality."

Johnson says those seeking to push an agenda should understand the consequences of their actions. He warns anti-gay laws could worsen already high HIV levels in east Africa.

"The impact of these laws on HIV prevention is extremely worrisome to us," he said. "Laws we are talking about in Uganda, Rwanda, will make it impossible for groups to do HIV education that targets men who have sex with men or that targets bisexual people and we know that there is a strong impact of HIV on this community and on society in general."

Lisa Laurel Weinberg, from the Massachusetts Lutheran Social Services Human Rights Protection Project, says the situation is already very difficult. In her other job as an asylum attorney, she recently helped a young Ugandan woman win asylum to the United States. The woman's apartment had been raided by police while she was inside with her girlfriend.

"The police broke in and brought them to the police station and raped them in what is called a corrective rape," said Lisa Laurel Weinberg. "It is when males of authority try and correct lesbianism through rape."

But Weinberg warns trying to fight the new laws from the outside is very complicated.

"I got an e-mail yesterday that said be really careful and check with Ugandans before you do any advocacy from the West, because us imposing our values, they are really sensitive to the whole colonialism history, so that the email cautioned be careful what you do and let it come from them," she said.

Some prominent politicians and journalists in East Africa have called homosexuality the "white man's disease." Pro-gay groups in the region, which are mostly underground, say they are becoming increasingly afraid to ask for help, and believe outside interference could worsen the persecution they face.

Find this article at:

<http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/human-rights/Africas-Anti-Gay-Laws-Spark-Accusations-and-Denials-in-US-79853182.html>

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