

THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

L'OBSERVATOIRE

pour la Protection des Défenseurs
des Droits de l'Homme

EL OBSERVATORIO

para la Protección de los Defensores
de Derechos Humanos

PRESS RELEASE

UGANDA: Ugandan and Kenyan LGBT rights' defenders prevented from taking the floor at the CHOGM in Kampala

Geneva-Paris, November 28, 2007. *The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, express their deepest concern about acts of harassment against Ugandan and Kenyan defenders of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), which took place from November 23 to 25, 2007, in Kampala, Uganda.*

According to the information received, on November 23, 2007, Ugandan and Kenyan defenders of LGBT rights, including representatives from Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), a prominent umbrella organisation advocating for the rights of homosexuals in the country¹, who were scheduled to give their addresses at the CHOGM Speaker's Corner in Uganda, were instead forcibly thrown out of the People's Space by the Ugandan police, which refused to allow them to enter again. In particular, the police broke sticks from trees in order to intimidate the defenders. When Ms. **Victor Juliet Mukasa** declared that she will "not move a single step from this place", the police threw her down. A person who came to help her was caned by the police.

The LGBT defenders remained standing outside the gate in quiet protest, waiting to be allowed back in to deliver their speeches. They stayed there for a total of seven hours. After dark, the LGBT speakers left peacefully and turned to the media to voice their disappointment with what was supposed to be one of the greatest fora for free speech.

The People's Space was indeed designed "to provide opportunities to share in the diversity and richness of the Commonwealth people" and was specifically designated as a space open to all people. It was intended to give people "renewed energy to facilitate social change with a clear sense of building the future together".

Furthermore, Amakula, a non-LGBT film organisation in Kampala, known for its celebration of African talent, professionalism, human diversity and creativity, also faced discrimination for showing at CHOGM a film that discussed homosexuality on November 22, 2007. On the next day, two members of Amakula were thrown out of the People's Space.

¹ SMUG advocates for the promotion and the respect of all rights enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution and international human rights instruments for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons - in particular the right to live free from any discrimination.

Defenders of the rights of homosexuals have been targeted with increasing frequency in Uganda. The Observatory strongly condemns these acts of harassment against LGBT human rights' defenders in Uganda, which only aim at muzzling their freedom of expression and which blatantly violate regional and international instruments on human rights that guarantee freedom of expression, in particular the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1998.

More generally, the Observatory calls upon the Ugandan authorities to put an end to any act of harassment against human rights defenders, and to conform with regional and international human rights instruments, in particular the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

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