

Ugandan law would give gays life imprisonment

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [January 22, 2014](#) issue

A Ugandan cleric who ministers to homosexuals has criticized the passage of a controversial law that imposes life imprisonment for homosexual acts.

Christopher Ssenyonjo, the former Anglican Bishop of West Buganda, said gay men have done nothing wrong and should not be punished.

He spoke in a telephone interview December 20, hours after legislators passed the law known as the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2009. President Yoweri Museveni must sign the bill within 30 days for it to become law.

“People here don’t understand what homosexuality is,” Ssenyonjo said. “If they did, I don’t think they would have allowed this law.”

Ssenyonjo was defrocked 2002 for his ministry to gay men. According to the cleric, homosexuality is not a sin, but actions against it were being justified through scriptures and culture. “I think people need education on the issue,” said Ssenyonjo.

The bill was first proposed in 2009 but had been shelved due to international pressure. President Barack Obama described the bill as “odious.” It initially proposed death sentences for certain homosexual acts in cases where one of the sexual partners is a minor or is infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

Homosexuality is illegal in 38 African countries according to a June report by the human rights group Amnesty International. In South Africa, same-sex marriage has been legal for years, and citizens of all sexual orientations have rights guaranteed by the constitution, yet seven people were killed in antigay violence in the that nation in 2012, the Amnesty International report said.

In 2012, Rebecca Kadaga, the Speaker of Uganda’s parliament, promised the law to Ugandans as a Christmas gift. The current bill passed would penalize people who are aware of homosexual activity but fail to report it. —RNS/added sources

This article was edited on January 3, 2014.