

Africans irked by Obama's call to treat gays fairly

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [August 7, 2013](#) issue

Religious leaders in Africa strongly rebuked President Obama's call to decriminalize homosexuality, suggesting it's the reason why he received a less-than-warm welcome during a recent trip to the continent.

In a news conference in Senegal during his three-nation tour, just as the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a federal ban on same-sex marriage, Obama said African nations must grant equal protection to all people regardless of their sexual orientation.

"My basic view is that regardless of race, regardless of religion, regardless of gender, regardless of sexual orientation, when it comes to how the law treats you, how the state treats you . . . people should be treated equally," Obama said. "And that's a principle that I think applies universally."

But Obama's words rubbed religious and political leaders the wrong way. In Senegal, the West African nation where Islam is the predominant religion, homosexuality is a crime. Christianity and Islam are growing fast on the continent, and religious leaders in both faith communities responded with vehement denunciations.

Indeed, some clerics said Obama's statements on gays spoiled the welcome religious leaders and their followers could have accorded the first African-American president. —RNS