

NEWS RELEASE

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Religious Leaders Call on Government of Uganda to Protect the Rights of Gays and Lesbians

(New York, February 15, 2008) -- A coalition of 120 religious leaders has called on the government of Uganda to protect the human rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) citizens in the East African nation.

In a letter to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni (full text below), the faith leaders call for an end to government sanctioned verbal assaults and legal attacks that abridge the human rights of LGBT people.

According to The Rev. Nancy L. Wilson, moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches, the international faith communion that organized the clergy letter, "We are especially concerned that members of the Museveni government have recommended criminal penalties against LGBT people based solely upon whom they love and have censored attempts by LGBT people to speak freely on their own behalf."

Rev. Wilson added, "At our best, faith leaders share a mutual goal with the leaders of government -- we are both charged to care for the oppressed and to protect the most vulnerable among us. The threats by some Ugandan government officials thwart the realization of that goal."

The letter, whose signers include Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu, Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Rev. Dr. Jane Spahr, Rev. Troy Plummer, and Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, notes, "The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights affirms the equality of all people and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects the right to equality, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. We are only asking that you hold up the solid principles your government espouses."

The Rev. Pat Bumgardner, chair of the Global Justice Ministry of Metropolitan Community Churches, added, "I share a deep concern with many faith leaders that this hostility by Uganda's government officials comes in the midst of the HIV and AIDS pandemic that still ravages so much of the African continent. The pandemic will be addressed effectively only in an environment where human rights are promoted and basic freedoms are protected. Stigma and discrimination push people deeper into closets of fear, making prevention and treatment much more difficult."

Noting that Uganda has the potential to model compassion and understanding to the world, the faith leaders wrote, "We reach out to you in fellowship and ask that you publicly condemn all harassment against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Uganda."

Founded in 1968, Metropolitan Community Churches is the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary, affirming ministry to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons. With congregations located in 28 countries, MCC is known as "The Human Rights Church" for its strong commitment to social justice.

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