

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS URGE THE GOVERNMENT TO STOP USING GAY RIGHTS AS A LEVERAGE TOOL FOR UGANDA'S SOVEREIGNTY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.



Members of the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law receiving the US Department of State 2011 Human Rights Defenders Award.

What is the civil society coalition for human rights and constitutional law in Uganda (CSCHRCL)?

The Coalition is a group of organizations who, faced with enormous threats, came together as eight Ugandan civil society organizations at the beginning of October 2009 to fight against the anti-human rights, anti-democracy, anti-public health, and indeed anti-constitutional agenda being promoted by the heinous Anti-homosexuality Bill. Within just a few months of being in existence, the Civil Society Coalition grew from the first 8 members, to a total of 33 local human rights organizations, representing women, children, HIV & AIDS, and sexual minority rights. In many ways, this was a ground-breaking and historical initiative because it was the first of its kind to bring together Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) activists, their feminist allies, and so many new civil society actors that, for the very first time were engaging in advocacy around sexual rights in Uganda. The coalition is based on values of Equality and Non-discrimination, Diversity, Humanity, Courage, Respect, Justice, Love, solidarity

Who funds it?

The Coalition is supported by well wishers and partners who are concerned by the increasing attempts to normalize and legalize discrimination towards Sexual and gender minorities in Uganda by Key institutional leaders in Uganda and beyond.

When did it come/ start in Uganda?

The Coalition was formed in 2009 in response to the Anti-Homosexuality bill of 2009 which was tabled by Ndoorwa West MP David Bahati.

What is its membership?

The Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law (CSCHRCL) is a group composed of over 45 member organizations which can be broadly categorized into 4; LGBTI organizations, Sex workers organizations, mainstream human rights organizations and Feminist organizations.

What are its motives/ objectives?

We seek to use our collective power to:

- Lobby for the promotion and protection of sexual rights in Uganda by raising public awareness, increasing the visibility of sexual minority struggles, and promoting tolerance and respect for diversity
- Strengthen LGBTI and other sexual minority rights activists' leadership and organizational capacities and increase spaces for LGBTI rights activism
- Strengthen other human rights individuals and organizational activist leadership on sexual rights and encourage them to engage with issues beyond their immediate mandates
- Advocate and Lobby for the eradication of laws that violate the human rights of sexual minorities in Uganda
- Build a more diverse and inclusive movement for social justice, by forging alliances and agendas between human rights organizations representing different sectors, movements, ages, backgrounds, and sexual orientations
- Create a just society for all by challenging patriarchy, religious indoctrination, state sponsored Discrimination and cultural prejudices

What are its achievements thus far?

- a. Bringing together LGBTI and non LGBTI organizations to jointly advocate for sexual rights

- b. Successfully blocked the Anti Homosexuality Bill 2009 from becoming law since 2009 till to date.
- c. Regular press statements on key sexuality issues.
- d. Successful prosecution of the case of Kasha Jacqueline, Pepe Onziema and David Kato Kisuule v. Rolling stone Newspaper.
- e. Rallying international support to our cause.
- f. Keeping debate on sexuality alive in the Ugandan media
- g. Increased visibility for sexual minorities' rights activists
- h. Ongoing Legal analysis of other key bills and laws affecting sexuality and Gender minorities.
- i. Use of structure, diversity, cohesion, use of judiciary, legal and social activism to advance human rights for all Ugandans.
- j. Participation in the UN Human Rights Council public sessions and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights Public sessions.
- k. Creation of more spaces for sexual rights activism and Dialogue in the mainstream Human Rights organizing.
- l. Recognized and awarded the 2011 Human Rights Defenders Award from the United States Department of State by Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton

What challenges has it encountered while in operation?

In a country where institutional leaders openly and actively call on the discrimination and violence toward minority groups and a country where majority laws and values of a country are shaped on the ideals of a few moral and cultural extremists and religious fundamentalists rather than the voices of the Ugandan citizen, we face many challenges, the biggest challenge being the very harsh and volatile environment we operate in- we have received death threats, suffered harassment, and faced intimidation from the government and other stakeholders, are at risk of arrest and we have suffered social and economic challenges that ensue from general societal attitude.

The issue of sexual rights has for so long been strongly enshrined in our African culture, but as with all social movements, the struggle for recognition and respect is always an uphill struggle, but one we are willing to take despite the inherent challenges

How does it resonate with the human rights day?

The work of the coalition revolves around promotion of recognition of human rights for all Ugandans that is the Rights to privacy, Right to health, and indeed Right to life- The rights that all Ugandans are entitled to

as enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution.

As a country which is 50 years old, we should be celebrating the achievement of Human dignity and protection of rights for all, rather than introducing laws that deny rights to some constituencies.

As a coalition, we actively advocate for restoration of the rights of a marginalized population which has long been denied these rights, and whose rights law makers are attempting to further frustrate, with the Anti Homosexuality bill.

Any messages you would want to communicate to the public out there on the human rights day?

I would like to reiterate a call to all Ugandans to return to the spirit of OBUNTU, a spirit that has for so long been part of our culture and traditions, a spirit that we were all brought up with, a spirit that binds us together and prohibits discrimination and violence towards our brothers and sisters. This is the tradition that I would urge all Ugandans not to lose, a tradition that I would like to raise my children to appreciate, a spirit that ensures that we respect all our diversities whether it be on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and tribe.

Human rights are human rights, and every Ugandan is born with these rights.

As a Coalition, we strongly oppose the growing attempts by people in power to assume that they can vote and decide on which Ugandans deserve rights and which Ugandans don't deserve rights! We further strongly oppose the government's attempts to use Gay rights to leverage their sovereignty with the International community, with complete disregard on how it affects innocent Ugandans.

We call on the Ugandan public to reject this attempt to separate human rights, because today it is sexual and gender minorities, and tomorrow it could be another group of people.

Any future prospects/ what you intend to do in the future?

We intend to continue to work towards eliminating the Heinous Anti-homosexuality bill, and any other related laws that are discriminatory and anti-human rights from infiltrating the laws of our dear country, and also continuing the conversation of sexual rights until the government recognizes these rights as human rights.

We also intend to continue to work towards ensuring that the current volatile environment that the Sexual and Gender minorities live in is bettered .