

Rights body attacks government over gays meet

By Martin Ssebuyira

Entebbe

Amnesty International, an international human rights non-governmental organisation, on Tuesday called on the government to put an end to its harassment of people involved in “lawful activities”.

The call came hours after the Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Fr. Simon Lokodo, stormed a conference in Entebbe being run by pro-gay lobby Freedom and Roam-Uganda, and closed it prematurely.

Abuse of rights

“This is an outrageous attempt to prevent lawful and peaceful activities of human rights defenders in Uganda,” said Ms Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s Secretary General in a statement issued on Tuesday. She said government must protect all people against threats, violence and harassment irrespective of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

Ms Shetty said government must allow legitimate, peaceful gatherings of human rights defenders, including those working on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender (LGBT) rights. **Uganda Sexual Minorities in Diaspora** head **Moses Kigozi** said such acts have made many Ugandans flee the country.

Diaspora responds

“As the Ugandan gay community in the diaspora, we are extremely disturbed with the activities of the minister of ethics,” he said. The minister on Monday morning announced that the workshop was illegal and ordered the activists out of the hotel where it was being held. Fr. Lokodo told activists that if they did not leave immediately, he would use force against them.

He also attempted to order the arrest of Kashas Jacqueline Nabagasera, a prominent LGBT rights activist and winner of the 2011 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, who was forced to flee from the hotel for branding him a liar because the minister told them he would only speak to the participants, not shut their workshop.

Bill tabled

The move comes days after the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, spearheaded by Mr David Bahati, Ndorwa West MP, was re-tabled in Parliament. The Government of Uganda has sought to distance itself from the Bill, stating that it does not enjoy government support.

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