

Yet more criminalisation of homosexuality in Africa

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into international waters, the devious fin of Tony Blair appears on the horizon, and his unique brand of opportunistic insincerity threatens to pull you under. In a joint interview with the president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Blair proved yet again that when swimming in international waters he is not prepared to defend the principles of democracy when they are challenged.



“Voluntary sodomy” – what an offbeat phrase *that* is – is illegal in Liberia, and can land you in jail for a year. It’s always about the sexual act with these backward laws, as if a person who is not heterosexual is defined only by what they do in bed. When Hilary Clinton announced last December that America’s foreign aid budget would promote the protection of gay rights, the Liberian government

kicked back by proposing to introduce two new laws. The first would make it a second-degree felony if a person “seduces, encourages or promotes another person of the same gender to engage in sexual activities”. Sirleaf was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year for her work in campaigning for women’s rights, and she’s clearly carrying on her role as an equal opportunities czar: the law would cover both men *and* women, unlike that sexist sodomy-only statute ... The second law would make gay marriage punishable by 10 years in prison. In other words, Liberia is having a political tantrum.

In an interview with Blair – throughout which **Sirleaf was belligerent about most everything, folding her arms and laying down the law – she said she would not decriminalise homosexuality**. Blair let this slide on the grounds that he was there in his role as the founder of the Africa Governance Initiative (AGI). “One of the advantages of doing what I do now is I can choose the issues I get into and the issues I don’t. For us, the priorities are around power, roads, jobs, delivery,” he responded when asked about it. It’s the same old Blair, the weasel who obfuscates and deflects his way out of anything he does not want to do.

What is the point of the AGI, a charity that aims to strengthen African governments, if all it does is reinforce prejudice? It isn’t charity to shore up regimes who would then crush the rights of their own people. But then, Blair has never been that interested in the follow through. From the war in Iraq, to his association with anti-gay US preachers with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, he is not interested in international law, just the messianic mission of Tony Blair. He’s all teeth, hair and false promises.