

Zambia: Rise of Homophobia prompted by Christian fundamentalists

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The move by the National Constitutional Conference (NCC) to adopt a clause that directly discriminates against homosexuals has caused fear and uncertainty in the Zambian gay community. Over the past two years, Zambia has undertaken a constitution making process with a view of adopting a constitution for all Zambians that could withstand the test of time.

The NCC was established under an Act of Parliament, i.e., Act No. 19 of 2007. The Act gives legal powers to the NCC to debate, recommend and adopt recommendations from the Mungomba Draft Constitution and Report.

From inception, the constitution making process has been marred by controversy and the process literally shoved down the throats of the Zambian majority who had earlier opposed the formation of the NCC and proposed a constituent assembly to adopt the 2005 Mungomba draft constitution.

Like Chiluba before him, Mwanawasa failed to adopt a constitution making process chosen by the people and imposed the NCC to delay the process for his convenience at a cost of millions of dollars to a nation gripped in the talons of poverty, illiteracy and disease.

Very little of value has come out of the NCC, to date, the conference comprises a majority of stooges from the ruling MMD government and spiritual leaders with faith based agendas.

What initially appeared as an opportunity for the nation has now turned into a witch hunting mission and a platform to extol the mundane with little attention paid to real national issues.

An ordinary day at the NCC includes debating on the qualifications of a presidential candidate whilst ignoring the critical issue of effectively addressing concerns of good democratic governance that, include adopting the absolute majority concept (50 plus one vote) in the electoral process to now ridiculing homosexuals.

On February 18th, 2010, the NCC adopted a clause that directly forbids same sex marriage in Zambia; this was in reaction to a proposal from a member of the NCC's human rights committee who moved to include a clause that directly forbids same sex marriages.

Under article 47(3) the proposed constitution provides for marriage between two people of the opposite sex who are above the age of 18 years. The delegate moved to add clause 5 to article 47 to read; "Marriage between persons of the same sex is prohibited."

NCC chairperson, Chifumu Banda, a prominent lawyer, tried to suppress the debate by insisting that clause 5 was already covered under clause 3 to the outrage of several delegates who defended the proposed clause to its adoption.

Justification for this regressive clause comes in the wake of the current persecution of the LGBTI community on the African continent. The NCC in their infinite wisdom felt that they could not leave anything to chance.

Medical Association of Zambia representative on the NCC Dr. Antoinette Phiri was very specific in her debate saying; "We don't want to leave this issue to interpretation somewhere else; we should adopt the clause as clearly as it is. "We don't want a situation where we have a law that is unclear about such serious issues; it must come out categorically clear that same sex marriage is forbidden. And this is the only chance we have to keep such a progressive clause."

These sentiments come from a medical practitioner with first hand knowledge of the current health situation in a nation struggling to contain the HIV/AIDS with zero interventions targeted at the LGBTI community.

Further, southern province minister Daniel Munkombwe went on to liken homosexuals to animals and further stated that animals are more superior to homosexuals as they do not engage in same sex relations, this statement was received with laughter and jeering from the conference delegates who could not even question the morality of a prominent leader referring to other human beings as lower than animals.

It is not the first time that Zambian law and policy makers have taken such a hard and homophobic stance against the LGBTI community. This is a direct attack against an already vulnerable community and may overshadow any successes that the community has made, to date.

On March 3, 2009, republican vice president George Kunda condemned homosexuality in parliament and called it a vice that needs to be stopped. This was in response to a member of parliament's request for feedback on what government was doing to curb homosexuality in the country.

Zambia is a Christian nation and it shall continue to be so because it is part of our constitution. And acts such as homosexuality are not part of the Christian norm. In 2005, this house passed stiff laws against homosexuality. For people having carnal knowledge of each other against the order of nature the punishment is a minimum of 15 years imprisonment. If you have carnal knowledge of an animal you serve a minimum of 25 years. Amidst laughter and cheering, vice president Kunda went on to say, "I know there are some prominent people in our society who are practicing homosexuality, some of them are engineers, some are lawyers and some are journalists."

If you have information about such people, report them to the law enforcement agencies. There are also some people who are bisexual and they marry to cover up their activities, but at the end of the day we know them, said vice president Kunda as the house cheered him on.

Zambia was proclaimed a Christian nation in 1991 by second republican president Chiluba, this, despite much protest from the Zambian community who continue to regard the declaration as unfortunate, at best, players in the born again movement applauded Chiluba as they saw this as an opportunity to directly benefit from Chiluba's immoral presidential slush fund.

The proclamation of Zambia as a Christian nation continues to divide the nation and remains the most powerful weapon that myopic and small minded leaders use to justify their unending and unjustified persecution of the LGBTI community in the country.

Chiluba was also the first incumbent president to relentlessly persecute the LGBTI community. He went on to justify his behaviour and said that, "Homosexuality is the deepest level of depravity. It is unbiblical and abnormal.

How do you expect my Government to accept something that is abnormal?" he had said?

This statement came after attempts by a Zambian human rights organisation LEGATRA were made to fight homophobia and ensure the protection of the rights of the LGBTI people in the country.

Clearly, in light of these developments, Zambia continues to regress even further into an abyss of ignorance, intolerance and fear. The challenge for the LGBTI community remains civil society's option to remain silent whilst such evils are being perpetrated but then, go on to condemn these violations at international conventions.

This is window dressing and it's purely targeted at accessing donor funds as opposed to promoting and protecting human rights for all Zambians.

The National Constitutional Conference (NCC) is currently in the process of recommending a timeless constitution, this is a constitution that abhors diversity, a constitution that is faith based, and a constitution that hypocritical leaders can be comfortable with, a constitution that will divide the nation and put human beings in little boxes. A constitution based on petty emotions, small mindedness and ignorance.

NCC delegates are reminded that Zambia is a nation for all Zambians and it most certainly is NOT a church!

Simply, if you aspire to be Christian, what would Jesus do?

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P.S.

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<http://www.siawi.org/article1695.html>