

A constructive religious voice on LGBTIQ+ rights needed for Africa

Sunday 15 October 2023, by [LESEJANE Gomo](#) (Date first published: 22 March 2023).

Rights groups in Africa are raising the alarm to address the growing exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, inter-sex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people from basic human rights in Africa. With three out of five African countries now enacting laws that criminalize the expression of sexuality or gender when it is as seen as contrary to heterosexual norms, the space for LGBTIQ+ rights is shrinking

Gomo Lesejane of Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) in South Africa writes on the efforts made to lend a voice to deliberately silenced LGBTIQ+ communities in Africa. She emphasizes the need for an alternative, constructive religious voice that is not heard loudly enough by religious, civil society, and government leaders in Africa today.

On the African continent, LGBTIQ+ people still experience multiple forms of discrimination and violence because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics.

In the first quarter of this new year alone, multiple reports have been made across Africa of gross violations that have been meted out by government officials, religious leaders, law enforcement officials, communities, and citizens against members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

It would seem that the resilience, fortitude and quest for justice put up by activists and allies alike is met with even greater opposition, antagonism, and marginalization by those who are entrusted with the protection the rights and dignity of all people.

Religion and politics continue to drive this discrimination and violence, particularly because they are part of what forms a person's identity. Homophobia, transphobia, and other related social ills have layered causes.

Socialisation in families, schools, places of worship and communities have influenced people's mindsets, perceptions and prejudices.

This deep-rooted antagonism then plays itself out in how governing structures, healthcare providers, the police and other law enforcement entities treat and respond to the needs of the Queer community.

The situation on the ground

Despite a groundbreaking pro-LGBTIQ+ ruling made by the Supreme Court of **Kenya**, the country's president and first lady have publicly condemned the court's decision to allow the National Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) to formally be registered as a non-governmental organization; even calling on citizens to "pray against homosexuality" in the country, declaring the practice as "a threat to the institution of the family."

Police in Lusaka, **Zambia** have charged and arrested four women for allegedly “organizing an unlawful assembly and giving false information to public officers.” The march was organized as a sanctioned demonstration against gender-based violence, but police allege it was “a cover to propagate homosexuality.

Ugandan members of parliament recently reintroduced an anti-homosexuality bill, which would “punish gay sex and recruitment, promotion and funding of same-sex activities”. The bill has since been passed into law, which criminalises identifying as a part of the LGBTIQ+ community. In addition to same-sex intercourse, the law bans “promoting and abetting homosexuality”, as well as “conspiracy to engage in homosexuality”. Attempts to introduce a similar anti-gay law in 2013 were struck down, but not without a “notable increase” in police abuse and extortion, evictions, and harassment.

In **South Africa**, one need not search far to realize the scourge of hate crimes against members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex community. Some cases have been documented and reported. Many others don’t make it onto Twitter timelines or hourly news bulletins. Even more live in fear that they could be next.

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An urgent need to act

It’s clear that there is an urgent need to equip communities and churches with resources to create communities that are affirming of LGBTIQ+ people.

Through advocacy workshops, media engagement, resource development and other collaborative programs, my organization – **Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)** – targets the origin of fundamentalism in religious and faith communities.

The organisation, based in South Africa, and working regionally on the continent, strives towards the full recognition, celebration, and participation of LGBTIQ+ people in Africa; as well as to be an alternative religious voice that raises awareness about the detrimental effects that religion can have on the lives of LGBTIQ+ people.

IAM’s success in bringing faith leaders and LGBTIQ+ groups constructively together around the dialogue table is consistent and demonstrated in the [impact stories](#) we see and hear through accompanying and journeying with our network partners.

We use [our theory of change](#) for individuals and groups to learn from our experience, avoid re-inventing the wheel, understand the change process, and focus on becoming outcome based change agents with maximum impact: thus changing minds and hearts, and opening doors. We believe that greater impact will be realised through work done both at the level of faith institutions and communities in countries across the region, as well as directly with individuals.

We remain confident that communities free of bigotry and discrimination are not only fair and just, but also prudent for such a time as this; and look forward to co-creating, building, repairing, and upholding these communities with all who are moved by the ideal of a world that is inclusive and free of hate.

Gomo Lesejane

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Karibu Foundation

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