

A Message at the LSVD 20th Year Celebration
By Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay, Pastor
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Lagos Nigeria.

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Let me begin my message with words of congratulations to Germany's largest Lesbian and Gay Federation. For twenty years of impact in Germany, in Europe and to other parts of the world. Thanks for inviting me here today from Nigeria as this is testament in our relationship and willingness to expand the Human Rights work spreading the legacy of the originators. Congratulations.

In the last twenty years you have focused on equal rights, law reforms, community cohesion, diversity, families and migrations, you have also gone to places where you believe liberation on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is key. We are encouraged in Nigeria and many parts of Africa of your achievements. I bring congratulatory messages from the board and entire members of Pan Africa International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, from the Metropolitan Community Churches and from House Of Rainbow MCC Nigeria.

I am Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay, I am gay, I am African and if you don't remember my name just call me the "Happy Holy Homosexual", The face of the faceless and the voice of the voiceless, because in Nigeria and many parts of Africa Homosexuals are not very happy people, but I want them to be happy.

Thirty Eight countries in Africa have laws criminalizing homosexuality, some with the death penalty, and many more with harsh jail sentences. By far it's the continent with the worst laws on the books when it comes to homosexuality and other sexual minorities, a phenomenon which is in part rooted on bad colonial-era laws, religious autonomy, strong negative belief in traditional and family values and the evil of patriarchy.

Politics and State Sponsored Homophobia

More than 50% of African government have taken action and steps to formally criminalised Same sex union, whilst the most venomous is the current debate in Uganda, and the prosecution of a gay couple in Malawi. Political and State Sponsored Homophobia has been on the increase in the last ten years.

In December 2008, the United Nations Assembly in New York issued a declaration to decriminalize homosexuality, only six African countries signed (Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, Mauritius, Central Africa Republic, Cape Verde, and Guinea Bissau)

In December 2008 Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung, LSVD's Human rights Foundation with the cooperation with ILGA and COC sent activists to New York to lobby around UN General assembly, the success of this for Pan Africa ILGA resulted in Six African countries signing the statement to decriminalise homosexuality. Since then HES has developed a keen and profound relationship with House Of Rainbow the organisation I represent today, hopefully we are successful in a cooperation project funded by the German Ministry of Cooperation, for this we want to say thank you.

The popularity of Gay Rights and advocacy for the social status of same sex union in the west have provoked politicians and government in Africa to react, many official appointments of openly gay political leaders have led to many reactions in Africa, including the infamous voice of President Mugabe who compare homosexuals to animals and called gays and lesbians "worse than dogs and pigs".

Recent cases of criminalisation of Same Sex Union in Africa including harassment, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture, humiliation, there is no part of Africa including South Africa with equality laws where the problem of criminalisation, judicial and honour killing on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity has not been highlighted in the last few decades, these abuses are happening whether we like this or not, whether we admit it or not.

Religion And Religious Homophobia

In 2003, American Episcopal Diocese appointed its first openly gay Bishop Gene Robinson to office in New Hampshire, The Primate of All Nigeria Anglican Communion, was extremely vocal about his views, Most Rev. Peter Akinola said that, "Anglican orthodox members of this church are poised to do the mission of the church and those who say that gay is their concern.. woe onto them." The Nigerian anti gay bill, had the blessing of the Nigerian Anglican Church and its leader Archbishop Peter Akinola, as well as the former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo who declared that homosexual practice "is clearly unbiblical, unnatural and definitely unAfrican."

We started House Of Rainbow in Nigeria in 2006, a place where the LGBT people can come and be themselves, a place we can help families reconcile sexuality and spirituality. However, there is hostility towards us, but the good news is that we are fighting back; we are educating and liberating our people, with your help and support we can do more in the next five to ten years. We are now a target of hate campaign of which I am sure that your organisation has had to deal with as well.

Tradition/Culture

Homosexuality in Africa has been blamed on Western European influence and colonialism, it has also been blamed on the radical intervention of technology. Homosexuality has been present in the African culture throughout history. In many African societies it is not uncommon to acknowledge same sex union, unfortunately modern sceptics are ignoring factual history.

Health Discrimination

The struggle against HIV/AIDS is also undermined by Criminalization of same sex union. The Human Rights Committee has noted that laws criminalizing homosexuality "run counter to the implementation of effective education programmes in respect of HIV/AIDS prevention" by driving marginalized communities underground, a finding supported by UNAIDS. Former president of Botswana Festus Mogae and UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa Elizabeth Mataka, have spoken out firmly and forcefully, against criminalization of homosexuality in Africa.

Implications for Sexuality & HIV/AIDS

Over the past twenty years, there has been a growing recognition of the relativity of sexual norms and of the difficulties of accepting Western conceptions of sexuality in Africa, including gay rights, public recognition of same sex families.

- An implication in my view is homophobia "deep-rooted" in culture, religion, music and law. Expressions of homosexuality are repressed by condemning homosexuals, their families, and friends.

- Mocking, shame, ostracism, scorn, violence, and prayers for salvation are reported means of keeping homosexuals in the closet or making them “normal.” Some homosexuals respond to this stigmatization by moving away from their countries, communities, families, others build supportive networks outside their communities, while others struggle to keep it a secret by “pretending to be heterosexual”.
- Same Sex people often lead multiple secretive lives, men or women on the Down Low also known as DL. Men who have sex with men (MSM) often do not admit they are gay or bisexual, these are largely married men.
- Homosexuality is often aligned with occultism.
- Many African Governments have no mandate or projected plans to include homosexuals (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Trans) in sexual health provisions and services.
- Inaccurate media publications, unethical reporting, dubious and negative publicity on matters of HIV and Homosexuality in Africa needed to be addressed to change attitudes.

The Way Forward/Recommendation

- Reform is urgently needed on all these fronts to legally reinforce Same Sex union, the legal status of same sex love and the full protection of human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS.
- Address underlying prejudices and discrimination through education programs in schools and community dialogue, to help create a more supportive environment for same sex union
- Promote media training, explicitly designed to discourage attitudes of discrimination and stigmatisation towards same sex union, especially in respect of HIV/AIDS. Encourage the media to adopt ethical rules of conduct that prohibit disclosure of confidential patient information.

I hope that in sharing this brief overview gives a clear understanding of the issues of same sex union in Africa and its implication for sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

It is my hope that the next twenty years of LSVD will have a greater impact and global achievement, beyond recognition. Thank you and happy anniversary. God bless you all.

About Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay

Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay, LLB, MTh, FACT is an ordained minister of the gospel, a Christian Theologian, openly gay, a dynamic and an inspirational speaker, poet, pastor and preacher, Executive Director of rbm consulting (Publishing) UK and Nigeria, the author of “Poetry Inspired” published in the UK 2001, founding pastor of House Of Rainbow Metropolitan Community Church Lagos Nigeria, founder of House Of Rainbow Fellowship London UK, holds a degree in law (London) and masters degree in theology, PhD Candidate in theology.

Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay, a British-Nigerian, is an executive member of the Pan Africa International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (PAI). He shares his time between the UK, Nigeria and the rest of the world.

Rowland Jide is a blogger, the author of “Pocket Devotional For Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual And Transgender Christians published 2005” & “I Say A Little Prayer For You’ published 2010”. He also moderates several online e-groups. The online site share discussions and devotions, prayers and blessings, News and other contributions.

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