

Human Rights Organizations Petition United Nations on behalf of 19 LGBTI People Arbitrarily Detained in Uganda due to Government's Discriminatory COVID-19 Response

Kampala, Uganda & Washington, DC -- On May 14, 2020 Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, and Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) filed a petition before the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention seeking a ruling that the Ugandan government unlawfully targeted and continues to unlawfully detain 19 LGBTI people under the guise of its COVID-19 response.

On March 29, 2020, the mayor of Nsangi Town Council, Hajji Abdul Kiyimba and officers of the Uganda Police Force targeted a known LGBTIQ shelter, Children of the Sun Foundation (COSF), in Kyengera Town Council, arbitrarily arresting twenty-three (23) people based on their perceived sexual orientation and gender identity, nineteen (19) of whom remain arbitrarily detained in state custody.

With anti-LGBTI discrimination and violence on the rise in Uganda, the government has denied rumors that it plans to reintroduce infamous "Kill the Gays" legislation -- a version of which was struck down by Ugandan courts in 2014. Instead, state security forces have increased harassment of LGBTI Ugandans and advocates, using COVID-19 as cover for carrying out the latest in a string of homophobic and transphobic raids and unlawful arrests.

The 19 individuals were denied access to their lawyers for weeks before a High Court eventually ordered reasonable access be granted on May 13 in advance of a bail hearing currently scheduled for May 18. United Nations experts have [previously expressed concern](#) that Uganda is using COVID-19 emergency powers to target LGBTI people. The petition filed this week initiates a formal complaint procedure against the government of Uganda and details multiple violations of Uganda's binding international human rights obligations.

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