

Faith Leaders Condemn Repressive Nigerian Legislation

February 27, 2007

Honorable Senator Ken Nnamani
President of the Senate
Owa Building
Amichi-Uwani
Awkunanaw
Enugu South, Enugu State
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Via email: knnamani@nassnig.org

Honorable Senator Ibrahim Mantu
Deputy President of Senate
Panshin Road Opposite Mangu Local Government Secretariat
Mangu, Plateau
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Via email: imantu@nassnig.org

Honorable Senator Nnamani and Honorable Senator Mantu:

It has been called to our attention that a bill now before the National Assembly would strip a section of the Nigerian people of their basic human rights. The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2006 goes far beyond banning equality in civil marriage. It is an assault on everyone's basic freedoms. As leaders of faith communities, we believe that respecting the dignity of every human being is a core spiritual value. We urge you as civic leaders to respect human dignity by rejecting this bill.

The bill says that the law will provide five years imprisonment to anyone who "goes through the ceremony of marriage with a person of the same sex," helps or supports a same sex marriage, or "is involved in the registration of gay clubs, societies and organizations, sustenance, procession or meetings, publicity and public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly in public and in private." It will also prohibit adoption of children by lesbian or gay couples or individuals. Arresting people for these acts challenges fundamental freedoms under the Nigerian Constitution and international human rights law and standards, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

This proposed legislation also hurts Nigeria in its struggle to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. This bill would drive part of the population deeper into invisibility and silence—cutting them off from any sort of education concerning how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights affirms the equality of all people. The

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Nigeria acceded to in 1993, protects the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders says that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: a) to meet or assemble peacefully; b) to form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups.”

Most importantly, this bill would strike at the equality, dignity and respect due all people in Nigeria. As faith leaders we are committed to building bridges of understanding across divides of difference. We believe all people of faith are called to work together for a world of justice, peace and equality. We urge you to resist the polarizing rhetoric of some narrow, religious ideologues and instead affirm the fundamental values of freedom reflected in the Nigerian Constitution.

We are asking that you oppose this bill and protect the equality of all Nigerians. Your assistance is necessary in order to overcome the discrimination that takes place in the world today. We are depending on you to do all you can to prevent this bill from being passed and to take a stand for the basic human rights of all people.

Sincerely,

[Among the many signatures:]

Canon Richard T. Nolan, Ph.D.
Retired Priest-in-Residence
Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church
Lake Worth, FL

CC:

His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Republic

Senator Oserheimen Osunbor, Chairman, Senate Committee on Judiciary,

Senator Julius Ucha, Vice Chairman, Senate Committee on Judiciary

Aminu Bello Masari, Speaker of the House of Representatives

Honorable Bala Ibn Na' Allah, Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary

Honorable Saudatu Sani, Chair, House Committee on Women Affairs and Youth

Honorable Peter Igbodo, Chair, House Committee on Human Rights

National Human Rights Commission

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