

## **IASSW statement on Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill**

1. The International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW] represents a global community of social work educators. IASSW upholds the *Definition of Social Work*, the *Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles*, and the *Global Standards for Social Work Education* as guiding standards for social work world-wide. As such –

1.1 IASSW is committed to education, research and practice, which promote social work's commitment and active contribution to the deepening and furtherance of human rights and social justice, as well as humane, respectful and mutually tolerant relationships in a diverse and globalising world.

1.2 IASSW embraces open and democratic dialogue and critical engagement within the social work profession and our respective social, political, cultural and economic contexts. We reject therefore any forms of discourse, practice, policies or legislation which are themselves intolerant, disrespectful and oppressive, serve to undermine human rights and social justice, or even threaten the safety, security and life of human beings anywhere on the globe.

1.3 IASSW supports the various international Human Rights Treaties and Conventions and affirms its unequivocal objection to any form of negative discrimination, directly or indirectly, against anybody, on any grounds. In particular, we endorse the view of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, that –

The principles of universality and non-discrimination admit no exception. The criminalization of different sexual orientation cannot be justified either as a matter of law or as a matter of morality.

1.4 IASSW unreservedly endorses Section 4.2.1 in the joint IASSW/IFSW statement on *Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles*, which calls for social workers to –

Challenge negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, racial or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs.

2. It is on this basis that IASSW expresses its grave concern about the proposed Anti-homosexuality Bill in Uganda, which if passed into legislation, would not only uphold the existing criminalisation of homosexuality, but also impose harsher punishment on a broader range of practices, including the imposition of the death penalty.

As IASSW, we are deeply concerned about the ethical implications of the state trying to police the most private and intimate aspects of people's lives.

3. IASSW notes, with equal concern, a statement issued by the National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) in support of the proposed Bill.

This statement is based on a number of erroneous assumptions, such as: 1) homosexuality is an abnormality/aberration, reflecting pathology that must be subject to extinction techniques; 2) homosexuals are the main perpetrators of child sexual abuse and 3) homosexuals are responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

3.1 Scientifically, the view cannot be sustained that homosexuality was a mal-adaptive and curable aberration from “normal” human behaviour, or that failure on the part of the state to “prevent or curtail” its practice would lead to its spread.

We therefore regard the public pronouncement of any such claims as disrespectful, stigmatising, hurtful, and even harmful in that this may

encourage, indeed repeatedly has encouraged, violence against members of the group thus stigmatised.

Further, failure to challenge the labelling of an entire group lends legitimacy to the practice of stigmatisation as such, potentially leading to the scapegoating of any other group that may in future come to be regarded as abnormal, unwanted, dangerous and potentially needing to be exterminated.

- 3.2 Human trafficking, child sexual abuse and rape remain the scourge of our societies. But these crimes – rather than for sexual gratification within same-sex groups - tend to be committed against children and women by a range of perpetrators for a vast array of reasons. The major modes of spread of HIV/AIDS, especially in the African context, are heterosexual intercourse and mother-to child-transmissions.

As social work educators, we are committed to the prevention of all forms of sexual abuse, irrespective of the sexual orientations of the perpetrators, and to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, irrespective of the mode of transmission.

- 3.3 NASWU's use of Scripture to vilify an entire group of people, to demonise their ways of life, and to defend discriminatory policy and legislation is of deeply concerning as well.

We acknowledge the important role of religion and spirituality as a motivating factor and ethical base of much social work practice around the world. At the same time, we must never forget that great crimes have been committed in the name of religion.

Thus, we should remain mindful of the diversity of faiths and religious convictions amongst social workers and the societies we serve. This will help guard against any attempt to abuse religion as a means of promoting intolerance and hatred, the justification of oppression, injustice and human rights abuses, or as a means of preventing certain

convictions and practices from being subjected to scientific scrutiny, ethical interrogation, and critical public deliberation.

4. In view of the above, IASSW regards the NASWU statement as inconsistent with social work's emphases on humanising our encounters with people, on protection of those most marginalized in our societies, and on embracing diversities – insofar as these diversities do not violate the inherent dignities and rights of persons to safety, to security and to life.

We therefore –

- 4.1 Urge NASWU to reconsider their stance on homosexuality, as well as their support for a Bill which condemns people on account of their sexuality, which seeks to render them voiceless, and which promotes the death penalty as a means of enforcing their compliance with its provisions.
- 4.2 Call on social work educators in Uganda to engage their students and graduates around what an appreciation of diversity, tolerance, mutual respect, non-violence and a commitment to the promotion of human rights and social justice might mean in their country and beyond.
- 4.3 Call on social work educators and practitioners around the world to infuse all our discourses and practices with the recognition of our common humanity which binds us together as social work practitioners, service users, educators and students.

The International Association of Schools of Social Work

May 2010