

"Opposing grave Human Rights Violations on the basis of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity."

Presented at the United Nations

By Kapya Kaoma

[Kapya Kaoma is an Anglican priest from Zambia and project director at the think tank Political Research Associates. His new report, *Globalizing the Culture Wars: U.S Conservatives, African Churches, and Homophobia*, is available at www.publiceye.org.]

As the world celebrates Human Rights Day on December 10, we need to ask, "Do sexual minorities have Rights to be protected and defended?" Most of us would affirm that but not everybody thinks so. Pastor Rick Warren, the best selling author of *Purpose Driven Life* and Pastor of Saddleback Baptist Church, California openly told Africans in March 2008, that "homosexuality is not a normal way of life" and therefore cannot be considered part of Human Rights. In March 2009, Scott Lively, the notorious author of *The Pink Swastika* – which blames gays for the Nazi regime – similarly repeated these words in Kampala, homosexuality has nothing to do with human Rights. "The idea that human rights serves the homosexual interests are absolutely wrong...Many of them are outright liars and they are manipulating history; they are manipulating facts in order to push their [gay] political agenda."

Religion and Human Rights

What is the relationship between my religious convictions and Human Rights? How can the two inform each other? Today, it is fashionable for people to use their religious convictions as the basis for Human Rights. With regard to LGBTI issues, most Right-Leaning Christian groups use their religious convictions to deny LGBTI persons their full Human Rights. In Africa, any argument is made that Christianity, Islam and African traditional values are opposed to homosexuality; In this case, homosexuality does not qualify to be considered part of Human Rights.

The above argument is supplemented by the Post-Colonial argument. LGBTI Human Rights activists are out to impose Western values on Africans. After all, homosexuality is foreign to African culture and therefore un-African. Human rights activists who support sexual minorities are viewed as promoting the international homosexual agenda of destroying the “traditional” family. Since LGBTI persons are said to be recruited into homosexuality by Europeans, Westerners associate Human Rights to same-sex relations as an attempt to promote their agenda. Presenting LGBTI issues in neocolonial ethos justifies the opposition of African political and religious leaders against sexual minorities in Africa as well as Human Rights activists. It also provides the rationale for their reactions.

With regard to the Rights of LGBTI in Africa, U.S. Conservatives have done more harm than good. For instance, Pastor Warren is one of the most influential figures in African politics. In March 2008, he traveled to Uganda to pronounce it his latest “purpose driven” nation, saying, “My challenge to business and government leaders is to use their influence for the glory of God and partner with local churches in solving community problems.” But the more African nations are declared “purpose driven,” the more church leaders promote active homophobia and the more laws are proposed criminalizing LGBT people.

And while Warren publicly distanced himself from Martin Ssempe, the pastor of Makerere Community Church who is one of the key architects of the persecution of LGBT people in Uganda, Warren’s Saddleback Church continues to have ties with leaders across Africa who advocate similar penalties against gays. In fact, his allies – particularly presidents like Rwanda’s Paul Kagame and Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni, and Anglican Archbishops Henry Orombi of Uganda, Peter Akinola of Nigeria, Emmanuel Kolini of Rwanda and Benjamin Nzimbi of Kenya – are in the forefront, advocating for drastic laws against LGBT persons in their countries.

During his March and April 2008 visit with African religious and political leaders in East Africa, Pastor Warren said, “Homosexuality is not a natural way of life and thus not a human right.” That statement has echoed through Africa, and only reinforces the hideous