

## **THE UGANDAN SHOW IS ALIVE – AND THANKS!**

By Hama Tuma

It has been said that solutions proposed by governments are often worse than the problems themselves and we can realize this when we consider many weird and strange laws decreed out of the blue to deal with problems that are sometimes only seen within the presidential palaces and the offices and villas of the officials. Uganda has given us one strange (and irrelevant) law after another and it has amused us to no end. Museveni's "scientific" tirade against homosexuality and his recent stringent decree against it actually concerns a minority in a country whose majority consider poverty, bad governance and corruption (by Museveni and his family) as their major problems. He went on to ban miniskirts too. Go ahead and laugh.

Actually, and if truth be told, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and other like him in Africa are not exceptions. There are by far too many strange, weird and absurd laws all over the world. Some are ignored and dated others are not still repealed. In Oklahoma you can be arrested for making ugly faces at a dog and in Devon, Texas, it is illegal to make furniture while you are nude. In France you cannot name a pig Napoleon, and in California it is illegal for a vehicle without a driver to exceed 60 miles per hour. In Switzerland it is illegal for a man to relieve himself standing up after 10pm and in Samoa it is criminal to forget your own wife's birthday. In Ethiopia, it was illegal not only to protest but to even think of protesting and push others to think of dissenting. In England it is illegal to die in the Houses of Parliament, to carry rabid dogs and corpses in a city cab and an act of treason to place a postage stamp bearing the Queen upside down. America is the weirdest as is to be expected: in Texas it is illegal to threaten a man with an unloaded gun, in Miami imitating animals is illegal, in Washington pretending to have wealthy parents is illegal, in Baltimore taking a lion to the cinema is also illegal, and in Texas if you are going to commit a crime you legally have to give the police 24 hours' notice. In North Carolina it is illegal to swear in front of dead people and in Florida having intercourse with a porcupine is very illegal. In Saudi Arabia, it is illegal for women to drive, in Bahrain a male doctor can check a woman's genitals only via a mirror and in Singapore chewing gum is illegal. In Equatorial Guinea it was illegal to observe Christmas, for the Boko Haram of Nigeria it is illegal to get modern education, the Al Shabab has banned the internet and in Ethiopia anyone found trying to access to prohibited web sites will be jailed.

I am not trying to make Museveni appear as a feather weight but his vitriolic against gays is not even original—Mugabe (whose first president was gay and a priest) has done it better. In Sweden, where prostitution is legal, it is illegal to use the services of a prostitute and in Thailand it is illegal to leave your house without your underwear. Israel makes it illegal to pick your nose on Sunday, in Turkey it is illegal for men above 80 years to become a pilot, and in Chicago it is illegal for anyone to eat in a place that is on fire. In Ohio, it is illegal to get a fish drunk and in Minnesota, it is against the law to hang male and female underwear on the same washing line. In Lebanon, you can be killed if caught having sex with a male animal but not punished if the animal is female. In Bahrain if you insult the king you get seven years in jail and a \$26,500 fine. In most African countries it is illegal to demand democracy, to yearn for good governance and accountability from the power holders. The burning issues of Uganda and many African countries do not concern dresses or sexual orientations and yet the rulers have to harp on these issues while persecuting anyone who would ask on corruption, bad governance, ethnic discrimination and real concerns of the majority of the people. Actually, it is ridiculous for immoral (and polygamous) rulers trying to legislate on morality with the advice (and money) of right wing American Christian evangelists/fundamentalists

Irrelevance is part of clever (does not mean good) governance in Africa. The rulers are adept at raising issues that are of no significance but become burning ones thanks to the State controlled media. The regime in Ethiopia is an expert at this art—it will blatantly steal an election, murder hundreds and manipulates the whole situation to make a gullible and amateurish opposition cry foul on the mere arrest of political dissidents. The main issue forgotten, the secondary concern made crucial—add a weird law to this and the whole focus of the people will be hijacked to a non-relevant issue. Make a carnival of the death of a tyrant (North Korea and Ethiopia for example) and Operation Diversion would be a success. How many women wear miniskirts in Uganda and who cares? Of what importance is it if women drive cars or take the same bus as men? Why should men with moustaches be forbidden to kiss women including their wives? Nigerians and Ugandans are more concerned by the fight against corruption, against the Boko Haram and the LRA, against the absence of basic necessities for millions, the violation of the rights of children and women. Fundamentalists of all hues need to be declared medically crazy but this would affect critical allies of Washington like the Middle East autocrats and it will not be tolerated. Alas, the malady is wide spread and the weird laws are universal. Smashing those who dare to protest is very much legal.

With its anti-gay law, Uganda has received many bashing from various quarters and aid money has been suspended. A perfect example of double standards and hypocrisy has raised its head once again. Zenebu Tadesse, the minister for women, children and youth affairs in Ethiopia, criticized the Ugandan law as if the world does not know that homosexuality is illegal in Ethiopia (15 years prison term) and that her masters had vowed that Ethiopia would be a burial ground for homosexuality. In addition, human rights criticism of the regime can get you 20 years in prison holes without even a warrant. (The Minister has been reprimanded by her strict masters and she has withdrawn her criticism of Uganda). That is why Washington's hue and cry against Museveni's anti-gay law may appear hypocritical because it has also weird laws and tolerates as good allies monsters with grotesque decrees and practices. It is to be remembered that Apartheid (talk of strange decrees!) was tolerated, backed and condoned by the West for long and the now eulogized Mandela was deemed a terrorist for years and his incarceration considered legal. In Ethiopia, the more the regime has turned repressive the more it has enjoyed Western support—who cares for some darkies being slaughtered so long as the killers are serving Western interests in the region? Obama built his cover when he said “we live in a world of imperfect choices”. This seems to be the justification for America's alliance with dictators from Equatorial Guinea to Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan and more. Museveni himself is a close ally of Washington despite his worsening human rights record. It is in this light that Uganda's anti-gay antics and banning of miniskirts becomes a farce much more like the antics of a Bokassa or Idi Amin. What decree will he propose next? It is like the cruel regime in Addis Ababa saying Ethiopians, who cannot afford three decent meals per day, need to diet and stop complaining of the rampant famine. It is like Chuck Hagel, the American official, talking of democratic progress in repressive Bahrain and Hilary Clinton embracing so many dictators as democrats and trying to babble about ‘great opportunities to develop democracy in Uzbekistan’ where one dissenter was even boiled alive.. Take the case of the dictator of Equatorial Guinea: “Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warmly welcomed Obiang to Washington as a “good friend.” Even President Obama has posed for a photo op with the dictator, who once won reelection with 103 percent of the vote in some precincts. Why all the love? Equatorial Guinea's \$9 billion oil and gas bonanza, almost all of it produced by U.S. companies, has made it one of the largest destinations for U.S. investment in Africa, and much of that oil, naturally, finds its way across the Atlantic”. Susan Rice wept for the late Ethiopian tyrant heaping praises on the man who had close to 35,000 political prisoners in his various known and secret prisons and had been accused of ethnic cleansing and massacres. So why the hue and cry against Museveni? How are women treated in all the Arab countries that are close allies of Washington? Aren't some countries, American allies, forcing preteen girls to marry old people? Freeing rapists so long as they agree to marry their victims?

Honor killings? And can America honestly condemn Museveni as it still treats homosexuality as an offense in its own states. Writing on this hypocrisy Tracy Clarke-Flory had the following to say in her article: Sodomy laws still exist?!

“When the Indian Supreme Court this week reinstated a law banning gay sex, everyone in my liberal social circle began circulating outrage. I shared in this — and yet, I couldn’t help but wonder at the remnants here in the U.S. of attempts of doing just that.

In fact, we still have laws against sodomy in several states – Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Utah. Currently. In the year 2013. [I pause to let you pick your jaw up off the floor.] Two states — Kansas and Texas — explicitly outlaw homosexual contact. That’s right: the United States of America still has laws on the books criminalizing gay sex”. Arizona?

Museveni is getting international heat and suspension of aid because of his anti-gay law. Other African countries have done the same without the outcry. No African regime has been threatened with sanctions for massacres, human rights violations and violent repressions that have all affected the majority, the millions and have ruined our continent. As I wrote years ago, homophobia on the part of the repressive regimes is but a cover for “demophobia”, a rabid fear of democracy and the peoples’ demand for good, or at least tolerable, governance. Museveni and others actually enjoy the hue and cry on the gay issue, a perfect distraction from very many serious problems. India, China, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, the Arab countries, Russia etc. are all engaged in the lucrative gay bashing—forget your serious problems, your hunger, the absence of democracy, the oppression of women, the sale of children, the political prisoners and the rampant torture, the injustice that shocks to no end and make sexual preferences the priority issue and just bash the gays. Amen!