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Cameroon: End ‘discriminatory’ anti-gay laws

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch joined the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), L’Association pour la Défense des Droits des Homosexuel(le)s (ADEFHO) and Alternatives Cameroun in urging the government to release all individuals detained under the discriminatory law.

“This use of criminal law to punish private sexual activity between consenting adults contravenes international human rights laws that Cameroon has signed and ratified,” said Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

“We are receiving an increasing number of reports that individuals are being targeted not only because of their sexual behaviour, which is the subject of these discriminatory laws, but because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. This use of criminal law to punish identities, as well as behaviours, is deeply concerning,” he added.

The organizations also ask that the government take steps to ensure the end of detentions, arrests and harassment of individuals on the grounds of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

In the last six months, at least ten individuals in Yaoundé and Douala have been arrested under the law.

One man, Jean-Claude Roger Mbede, was convicted and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment on 28 April 2011. At least six others, arrested in July and August 2011, remain in custody, while three men were arrested and then released.

“We have received information that at least some of these men were subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in custody,” said Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch.

The human rights organizations also express their concern at Cameroon’s plans to increase the penalties for consensual same-sex sexual acts under the law to 15 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 2 million francs CFA (\$ 4104 USD).

“Individuals who are detained under this law face further human rights violations in detention,” said Alice Nkom, executive director of Cameroon rights organization ADEFHO.

“In Cameroon, where homophobic sentiments are common, they are at risk of violence or discriminatory treatment by other detainees or even prison officers because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity,” she said.

As well as the human rights violations perpetrated against individuals detained under the law, discriminatory laws also have a wider impact on Cameroonian society.

“Discriminatory laws that target individuals on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity create a climate of fear for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI)

individuals,” said Parfait Behen, the president of Alternatives Cameroun.

“These laws allow police and other actors to target individuals for harassment or violence with impunity, said Cary Alan Johnson, executive director of IGLHRC.