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Nigeria urged to halt bill banning same-sex relationships

Amnesty International today reiterated its call on Nigerian authorities to scrap a harsh bill that if passed into law would attack basic rights and criminalize relationships between people of the same gender.

Nigeria's Senate passed the "Same-Gender Marriage" bill today. It will now go before the House of Representatives for approval, after which it will be sent to the President.

By broadly defining "same-sex marriage" as including all same-sex relationships, and targeting people who "witness", "aid" or "abet" such relationships, the bill threatens the human rights of a large number of people.

"Nigeria's House of Representatives should show leadership and uphold the rights of all in Nigeria by rejecting this reprehensible bill," said Erwin van der Borgh, director of the Africa Programme.

"If passed, this measure would target people on the basis of their identity, not merely their behaviour, and put a wide range of people at risk of criminal sanctions for exercising basic rights and opposing discrimination based purely on a person's actual or presumed sexual orientation or gender identity."

Under the bill passed by the Senate today, an individual in a same-sex relationship could face criminal penalties of up to 14 years' imprisonment, an increase compared to the earlier draft. The bill also seeks to impose up to 10 years' imprisonment and a stiff fine on anyone who "witnesses", "aids" or "abets" same-sex relationships.

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations previously outlined a range of concerns over the bill's potential human rights impact.

It would place a wide range of people at risk of criminal sanctions, including human rights defenders and anyone else – including friends, families and colleagues – who stands up for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people in Nigeria.

Individuals could face imprisonment based on nothing more than their actual or assumed sexual orientation or gender identity, or stemming from allegations about their relationship status or consensual sexual conduct.

Amnesty International also raised concerns that the bill would contravene Nigeria's efforts to prevent HIV transmission by driving people already suffering stigma for their identity or consensual sexual behaviour still further underground.

"This bill would have a chilling effect on a range of civil society organizations and events while inciting hatred and violence against anyone suspected of practicing same-sex relationships, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people," said Erwin van der Borgh.

"By aiming to single out and deprive the rights of one group of people, this bill threatens all Nigerians by

violating the country's Constitution and international human rights obligations.”