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Uganda: Government raid on LGBT-rights workshop

A Ugandan cabinet minister today raided a workshop being run by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists in Entebbe, prompting Amnesty International to call on the government to end its outrageous harassment of people involved in lawful activities.

The Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Simon Lokodo, who was accompanied by police, announced that the workshop was illegal and ordered the rights activists out of the hotel where it was being held. He told activists that if they did not leave immediately, he would use force against them.

“This is an outrageous attempt to prevent lawful and peaceful activities of human rights defenders in Uganda,” said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

The Minister also attempted to order the arrest of Kasha Jacqueline Nabagasera, a prominent LGBT rights activist and winner of the 2011 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, who was forced to flee from the hotel.

The reasons for the attempted arrest were not immediately clear, but were reported to be linked to Kasha Jacqueline’s attempt to challenge the Minister’s actions.

“The Government of Uganda must protect all people against threats, violence and harassment irrespective of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

The move comes days after the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was re-tabled in the Ugandan Parliament. The Government of Uganda has sought to distance itself from the Bill, stating that the bill did not enjoy government support.

“The Government’s claimed opposition to the Bill needs to be supported through their actions. The Ugandan government must allow legitimate, peaceful gatherings of human rights defenders, including those working on LGBT rights,” said Salil Shetty.

If the Anti-Homosexuality Bill becomes law, it would violate international human rights law and lead to further human rights violations.