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Homosexuality in Uganda: Canadian Aid at Death's Door

Canada is recognized worldwide as a leading nation in terms of humanitarian assistance and foreign aid. The Canadian value of respect for human rights is legally supported and protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Although Canada has a highly developed standard and tolerance for individual freedoms, many countries in the world lack the structure and ability to establish basic human rights. Recently, the African nation of Uganda has been at the forefront of these issues. Under current legislation, it is illegal to be gay (Bahati 2009). In October 2009, the Ugandan government tabled a bill proposing an increased maximum penalty for homosexuality punishable by death (Amnesty International 2010). This Anti-Gay Bill has sent a shockwave of outrage around the world prompting many nations to reconsider their financial contributions to Uganda. Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, has expressed his strong opposition to the bill and many western countries have threatened to withdraw millions of dollars in foreign aid to the country (Cobb 2009). Throughout history, Canada has set a precedent for global assistance in many underdeveloped countries; why should this case be any different? Despite the Ugandan government's recent bill proposing harsher penalties for homosexuality, Canada has a moral obligation to continue providing foreign aid. Canada's support as a respected member of the United Nations is crucial in providing a basic standard of care for the people of Uganda regardless of the country's political discrimination based on sexual orientation. To

support my argument, I will first outline the details of the Anti-Gay Bill and its contemporary challenges in Ugandan society. I will then discuss the role Canada has had in the United Nations and the responsibility we have to engage in international humanitarian missions. Finally, I will detail the reasons why we have an obligation to continue providing foreign aid to Uganda.

Homosexuality is not a recent issue among Ugandans; in fact, homosexuality has always existed in Africa. It was not until 1890, when the British Empire colonized Uganda, that homosexuality was criminalized due to the interpretation of Christian beliefs¹ (Cole, Manuh, and Miescher 2007). The Word of God is extremely influential in Uganda as more than 85% of its citizens devote their lives to Christianity (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002). However, this does not rationalize the recent acts of Ugandan officials denying basic human rights and freedoms to its people. In October 2009, Ugandan Member of Parliament, David Bahati, tabled a bill proposing an increased maximum penalty for homosexuality from life imprisonment to death² (Bahati 2009). Under this Anti-Gay Bill, you do not even have to be gay to be convicted of homosexuality. If you are aware of a homosexual relationship and fail to report it to Ugandan authorities within twenty-four hours, you can be incarcerated in prison for up to three years (Muskin-Pierret 2010). Bahati claims that the bill “aims at strengthening the nation’s capacity to deal with emerging internal and external threats to the traditional heterosexual family” (Kiapi 2010). How can such an abhorrent bill strengthen society when it is so discriminatory? In order to truly strengthen the social fabric of Uganda, human rights need to be established. The first step in making positive change is realizing that a problem exists. When a country is struggling and deeply entrenched in its long history of religious and cultural beliefs, outside agents need to provide guidance in order to bring awareness to discrimination. Uganda cannot do it by themselves.

Canada has consistently demonstrated a genuine interest in promoting human rights around the world. Not only has Canada financially supported underdeveloped countries where the efforts are economically worthwhile, but it has also initiated many peacekeeping missions where there is no economic, political, or military stake in the crisis. In essence, this is the epitome of Canadian foreign affairs; Canadians are ready to help during desperate times regardless of personal gain or rational. In 1956, Lester B. Pearson proposed the first-ever peacekeeping mission to the General Assembly of the United Nations (Kilgour 2004). Canada's role in the Suez Canal Crisis³ set a precedent for global assistance and put Canada in the forefront of international intervention (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada 2008). Since its initiation in foreign affairs, Canada has remained devoted to the United Nations and peacekeeping efforts. Canadian Member of Parliament, David Kilgour agrees that "[p]eacekeeping is now an integral part of our national identity" and "an effective political and human mediator in this complex world" (Kilgour 2004). However, even though Canada has a reputation of tolerance and setting a high standard of law protecting people's rights, it has been a process to get us where we are today. As Nierobisz et al. explain, "the latter decades of the twentieth century witnessed profound transformations in the treatment of homosexuals in Canada" (Nierobisz, Searl, and Th  roux 2008). In 1965, Canadian Everett Klippert was charged with four counts of gross indecency after admitting that he engaged in sexual activities with consenting male partners⁴ (Matthews and Pratt 1988). It was not until the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was introduced as part of the Constitution Act in 1982 that the government finally addressed discrimination⁵ (Canadian Heritage 2010). Although this was a monumental movement that established Canada as a model for human rights, it does not mean that discrimination in Canada is non-existent today. The key to formulating a just society based on equal rights is in recognizing the

discrimination that *does* exist and implementing a plan to support everyone involved.

Many countries, such as Uganda, fail in determining where these social inequities lie and thus, fail to establish a basic set of moral rights; this is where Canada comes in. Due to our rich and successful history in International affairs, Canada has a moral obligation to support Uganda through governmental guidance and foreign aid.

You may be wondering by now, why we should support a country whose beliefs completely contradict our own? By giving the Ugandan government millions of dollars every year, are we not supporting homosexual discrimination? The truth is: people are dying. Uganda's history is full of turmoil; from the political repression, ethnic persecution, and corrupt government of Idi Amin⁶ to the AIDS pandemic that has swept across Africa, Ugandans are in desperate need of assistance. Canada has a social responsibility and moral obligation to continue providing foreign aid to Uganda. In 2008-2009, Canada gave the Ugandan government \$19.9 million in foreign aid earmarked for educational systems, women's rights, and AIDS in Uganda (CIDA 2009). This money is being allocated to people whose lives depend on the constant donations from Canada; it is not just given to the government to spend at their will. If the Anti-Gay Bill is enacted, Sweden has threatened to discontinue their annual \$50 million in foreign aid⁷ (Muskin-Pierret 2010). President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, has been careful to take a stance on the issue as to not disrupt incoming foreign partnerships. For a country with a Gross Domestic Product comprised of one-third incoming donations, this foreign aid is vital to Uganda's economy (Hadley 2010). Although the allocation of our money is essential, the most important reason for Canada to provide foreign aid to Uganda is to maintain influence over their government. If we are not politically tied with Uganda through foreign aid, who are we to tell Ugandan officials what to do? By establishing a relationship with Uganda, we can have a voice in their government. Stanley Hoffmann, a

professor at Harvard University, suggests that “a nation’s obligation and ability to influence are greater with states with which it is closely connected, for its motives will be less suspect, its tactical judgments better informed, and its claim to be listened to more easily established” (Matthews and Pratt 1988). This aid should not be misconstrued as Canadian support for discrimination of homosexuality, but considered as an offering of our guidance and mentorship. It is evident that the bill denouncing homosexuality in Uganda angers our Prime Minister; however, Stephen Harper needs to critically think about the consequences of withdrawing foreign aid to Uganda. By cutting off our monetary assistance, we would be taking away the opportunity to develop human rights in an underdeveloped country and in turn, closing the door to the glimpse of a better tomorrow for the people of Uganda.

As Canadians, we support an eclectic society; we are a mosaic of diversity. Our successful history in human rights permeates through the social structure of our country and is the foundation for our foreign contribution. However, no matter how progressive we think we are, human rights is a project that we must all continue to work at. If we can strive for growth here in Canada, just think of the possibilities elsewhere. Ugandans are in need of help, and we have an obligation to support them regardless of their discrimination based on homosexuality. How can we let innocent people die? We do not have to agree with their every move, but we *do* have a responsibility to help those who are dying; we have a moral obligation to open the door to Uganda. We must open the door to influence their government. We must open the door to take a stance against anti-homosexuality. We must open the door to establish a basic standard of care and give life to those in need. We must open the door to Uganda before it is too late, and before the door closes completely.

¹ The outlaw of homosexuality stems from nineteenth-century British authorities and the Christian belief that homosexuality is a sin. The Apostle Paul wrote that homosexuality “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Strauss)

² Those who are sentenced to death are considered guilty of “aggravated homosexuality”. A person who commits this act is found guilty if they are HIV positive, in a power of authority over the victim (ie. teacher), or if they have been previously convicted of homosexuality

³ In 1956, there was much political debate regarding the Suez Canal in Egypt as a major passageway to the Mediterranean Sea. Britain, France and Israel made suggestions to Egypt regarding its use as a canal. Debate turned into invasion of territory, and led to political unrest in the world. While serving as Canada’s External Affairs Minister, Lester B. Pearson (before he was Prime Minister) led the first peacekeeping mission in the world. For his efforts and success in handling the Suez Canal Crisis, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957

⁴ Klippert was found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison. Later, his sentence was lengthened as he was deemed a dangerous sexual offender by psychologists. He remained incarcerated until 1971. His appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1967 was denied

⁵ Same-sex marriage was not made legal in Canada until 2005 (Bill C-38). See (Arron 2006)

⁶ Idi Amin was the President of Uganda (1971-1979) and a military leader responsible for a military coup that resulted in the deaths of up to 500,000 Africans. He is responsible for the poor human rights in Uganda today and titled himself, “His Excellency, President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor, Idi Amin Dada” and “Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular”. See (Keatley 2003)

⁷ Many other countries have considered this withdrawal of monetary support, though Sweden is the only country who has made an official statement. For example, the United States of America gives over \$200 million a year to Uganda and have considered cutting off this foreign aid

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Cole, Catherine M., Takyiwaa Manuh, and Stephan F. Miescher, eds. *Africa After Gender?* Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2007. Print.

In the book "Africa After Gender?", the editors outline gender in an African context. Through articles from other authors, they describe how discrimination based on gender, sex, and sexual orientation is prevalent in many African countries. In the first chapter of the book, "Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda", Sylvia Tamale outlines the Ugandan government's view on homosexuality. As a human rights activist in Uganda, Tamale argues against the current law in her own country and the harshness of its penalties. She goes further to explain the role of sexuality in politics and the culture associated with being gay in an unaccepting nation. Tamale uses her personal experience and expertise to make her argument against anti-homosexuality. As a professor of law at Makerere University, the credibility of Dr. Tamale's work is clearly established. By using other academic sources to further validate her argument, she formulates a persuasive analysis of homosexual individuals. Human rights activists, the Government of Uganda, and the general public will find this chapter helpful in discovering where they stand on this issue. By looking at both sides of the argument, Tamale's work generates a new way of thinking about homosexuality.

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Matthews, Robert O., and Cranford Pratt, eds. *Human Rights in Canadian Foreign Policy*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988. Print.

In the book "Human Rights in Canadian Foreign Policy", the editors bring together a collection of many authors' work to detail and assess the history of human rights in Canada and how these rights have come to affect foreign policy-making. The authors

discuss the foreign policies belonging to Canada and how they promote human rights in underdeveloped nations. As many of the problems in these countries stem from the role of their government in society, there are many opportunities for the Canadian government to intervene and contribute to the growth of these oppressed nations. The authors successfully create an unbiased piece of work by looking at many different academic sources; this establishes the credibility of the authors and is one of the distinctive features of this book. The authors delve into the specifics of many different policies, covenants, and organizations while using direct quotes from experts to qualify their role as authors. The fact that the editors both taught political science at the university level and conducted research in International Studies also validates the credibility of their work. As the scope of this book is so large, it will prove useful for a wide range of people including political groups, human rights organizations, and the general public. The impressive reference section also makes this book helpful for the reader.

Muskin-Pierret, Leah. "Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill." *The Young Idealist* 1.1 (2010): N.p.. Web. 20 Nov. 2010.

Nierobisz, Annete, Mark Searl, and Charles Th  roux. "Human Rights Commissions and Public Policy: The Role of the Canadian Human Rights Commission in Advancing Sexual Orientation Equality Rights in Canada." *Canadian Public Administration*. 51.2 (2008): 239-63. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 17 Nov. 2010.

In the article "Human Rights Commissions and Public Policy: The Role of the Canadian Human Rights Commission in Advancing Sexual Orientation Equality Rights in Canada", the authors examine the changes in Canadian public policy throughout history to show how equality rights of homosexual persons have developed. They conclude that, under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, every person has the right to live free of discrimination regardless of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. The authors make their detailed argument free of personal opinion by using many academic sources, reports from the government, and statistical data. As a useful feature of the text, the authors provide examples of complaints made to the Canadian government regarding sexual equality rights before they were put into practice. The credibility of this article is established by the authors' expert affiliations. Nierobisz and Searl are both professors researching Human Rights at Carleton College while Th  roux is the Director of Research of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Other governments around the world can use this article as a model to establish their own rights and freedoms. It is a helpful text for the reader as it depicts the long process in which it takes to turn public opinion into law.

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Response to Rough Draft

After closer inspection of my essay, I realized there were many alterations I had to make. Among the many challenges, the biggest challenge I had was eliminating one hundred words from the text to meet the requirements of the assignment. I felt like every point that I had made was a critical idea that supported the development of my argument; I had a difficult time letting go of any of my words. To tackle this issue, I read each sentence by itself, and asked myself if every sentence that I wrote completely relates to my thesis. Although this was a tedious process, I was able to eliminate words that were unnecessary to the development of my essay and use more endnotes to help move some valid statements out of the main body of the essay. Other than this, I continued to polish my essay, eliminating contractions and changing words as suggested by my professor. I also fixed the format of my essay so that it fits the MLA essay style. One error I noticed was in the validity of one of my statements. I said that the United States has threatened to withdrawal foreign aid to Uganda if the Anti-Gay Bill is enacted. After looking at the source again, I realized that this is incorrect, as they have only talked about withdrawing support to Uganda; no official public statement has been made. To finish the essay, I finished the conclusion and inserted my bibliographical references at the end. I took into consideration the suggestions from my professor in terms of the conclusion and this helped wrap-up and tie everything together. All in all, I was able to create a piece of work that I am extremely proud of; especially by taking the time to carefully read and edit the essay.

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² Those who are sentenced to death are considered guilty of “aggravated homosexuality”. A person who commits “aggravated homosexuality” is found guilty if they are HIV positive, in a power of authority over the victim (ie. teacher), or if they have been previously convicted of homosexuality

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