

Uganda to ban NGOs accused of promoting gay rights
By Jocelyn Edwards, Reuters
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KAMPALA (Reuters) - Uganda said on Wednesday it was banning 38 non-governmental organisations it accuses of promoting homosexuality and recruiting children.

Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda, along with more than 30 other countries in Africa, and activists say few Africans are openly gay, fearing imprisonment, violence and losing their jobs.

Ethics Minister Simon Lokodo told Reuters the organisations being targeted were receiving support from abroad for Uganda's homosexuals and accused gays and lesbians of "recruiting" young children in the country into homosexuality.

"The NGOs are channels through which monies are channelled to (homosexuals) to recruit," the minister, a former Catholic priest, said.

He did not name which organisations were on the list.

A bill calling for harsh penalties against homosexuals and outlawing the "promotion" of homosexuality, including providing financial support to gays and lesbians, is pending in the east African country's parliament.

A previous bill called for the death penalty for repeat offenders, although the new version is expected to drop this clause, as well as calls for life imprisonment, after international condemnation of the proposal and threats to cut off aid.

Lokodo said the local and international non governmental organisations would be de-registered for promoting homosexuality.

"I have got a record of meetings that they have held to empower, enhance and recruit (homosexuals)," Lokodo said.

On Monday, he ordered the break up of a gay rights conference being held at a hotel just outside the capital Kampala.

Police officers sealed off the venue for several hours, detaining gay activists from around the region.

"They claimed they (were) investigating a security threat," Pepe Julian Onziema, an activist with Sexual Minorities Uganda who attended the conference. "(The minister) is just trying to intimidate us."

Around 15 activists from Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania were questioned and later released without charge.

"They were questioned on what exactly they were up to and the assembly they were involved in," Kampala Metropolitan police spokesman Idi Senkumbi said.

Mohammad Ndifuna, the director of Human Rights Network Uganda, one of the organisations to be banned, said the minister's threat was part of a larger attack on civil society in Uganda.

"We know that they have been all kinds of threats coming towards the (NGO) sector for different reasons," said Ndifuna.

In May, Uganda threatened to de-register the British charity Oxfam over accusations of government involvement in violent land grabs in the country.