

The homophobia epidemic

Violence against gay and transgender people is on the rise around the globe.

BY WILLIAM FELICE — OCT 24, 2017 1 PM



PIXABAY.COM

Hurricanes, fires and nuclear war dominate the daily news. Yet another global crisis has tragically been ignored by the media: an epidemic of brutality and violence directed at the gay and transgender community.

Observe the following recent events:

- More than 80 people identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender have been detained since mid-September in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital. Some of these detainees have been subjected to beatings and electric shocks.

- More than 50 people were recently arrested in Egypt on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Law enforcement officers engaged in entrapment on websites and chat rooms to make some of these arrests.
- In October, police in Jakarta, Indonesia, arrested 50 people at a sauna “on the basis of their perceived sexual orientation.”
- In September, 20 people were arrested in Zanzibar for alleged homosexuality. Twelve women and eight men were rounded up at the hotel where they were receiving training about HIV/Aids education programs. Gay male sex can bring a punishment of up to 30 years in jail in the country.
- According to Amnesty International, 38 out of 54 African countries criminalize “consensual same-sex conduct,” making homosexuality illegal throughout 70 percent of the continent. Gay men have been arrested in Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia. Homosexuals can be put to death if convicted of “sodomy” or “indecent” sexual activities in Mauritania, Somalia and Sudan.

Despite this horrifying record, on September 29 the United States joined with 12 other nations and voted against a United Nations Human Rights Council resolution that specifically condemned the use of the death penalty as a punishment for consensual same-sex relations. With the overwhelming support of nations from Europe, Latin America and other democracies, the resolution passed anyway, with 27 in favor of condemning this abuse of the death penalty.

There are at least two reasons why Europe and the United States bear a large degree of responsibility for this rampant homophobia infecting the planet.

First, hatred against gay people is not indigenous to any of the world’s cultures. Definitive academic studies consistently confirm that homosexuality is native to all ethnicities and peoples throughout time and in all cultures on all continents. These studies also verify the decisive role of European colonialists and religious proselytizers in the creation of homophobic norms and attitudes. It was contact with foreigners that created the fear and prejudice of the LGBTQ community that is so viciously on display today.

And second, the U.S. Christian right, having lost this cultural battle in America, is in the forefront today of promoting homophobia around the world. According to the Rev. Dr. Kapya Kaoma from Zambia, American missionaries in their travels preach animosity toward the LGBTQ community. In numerous scholarly journals and in articles he has written for the likes of Huffington Post and the *Los Angeles Times*, Rev. Kaoma courageously exposes and reveals how these American religious organizations fan the flames of the culture wars over homosexuality throughout Africa.

In July 2013 the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights launched its “Free & Equal” global public education campaign for LGBT equality in Cape Town, South Africa. The former high commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, stated that basic human rights protections remain a “hollow promise for many millions of LGBT people forced to confront hatred, intolerance, violence and discrimination on a daily basis.” South African Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu likened the fight against gay prejudice to the antiapartheid struggle and said that he would rather go to hell than worship a homophobic God.

As global citizens, we have a human rights duty to not only speak out against this ongoing violence directed at the LGBTQ community, but to actively support the local, national and global efforts to end this brutality.

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