Press Statement

The MenEngage Alliance, a global network working worldwide to increase men’s support for gender equality and human rights, mourns the death of David Kato, a fearless advocate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersexed people (LGBTI) rights in Uganda. We call on the Ugandan Government and the African Union to take swift action to bring his murderers to book and to make clear their commitment to protecting the rights of LGBTI people across the continent.

David was murdered on Wednesday, January 26th, 2011 in a brutal attack. We express our sincere condolences to his family, to Sexual Minorities Uganda, for whom David Kato tirelessly campaigned and his many friends and colleagues from civil society. The MenEngage Network stands in solidarity with the courageous LGBTI activists in Uganda and across the continent. We are greatly saddened by this loss.

Uganda has been the epicenter of vitriolic hate campaigns against LGBTI communities. An anti-homosexuality bill currently before the Ugandan Parliament has been roundly condemned across the world and a number of newspapers have published inflammatory and hateful articles, including an article in the extremist newspaper The Rolling Stone with the inflammatory headline, ‘Hang them, they are after our kids’ and photographs of members of Ugandan LGBTI organisations. Articles such as these contributed to the escalating death threats Kato and others advocating for LGBTI rights had reported receiving.

We agree with the statement issued by the South African human rights organisation Amandla who say, “the killing of Kato and persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people on our continent is an attack on democracy, equality and human rights for all. Struggles for justice and human rights are not complete without addressing state and religion sponsored homophobia and persecution of LGBTI people.”
In their statement condemning David’s murder, the Ugandan Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law said: “the climate of fear and homophobic hatred stirred up in Uganda by political and religious leaders, as well as some sections of the public media, a murder of this kind was increasingly possible; the question was not whether it would happen, but when. David, along with fellow activists, had been facing direct intimidation, including receiving threats, for many months before he was killed. The matter now, therefore, is to ensure that those who survive can be better protected from violence.”

The MenEngage Alliance and its member organisations across the world, including in many African countries, urge the Ugandan government to take immediate action to arrest the perpetrators of David’s murder and make clear to the Ugandan people that such acts of hatred will be met with swift and severe sanction. We call on the Ugandan government to decriminalize same-sex relations and withdraw the Anti-Homosexuality Bill currently before the Ugandan Parliament. This bill has fanned the flames of hatred and led to many acts of violence. We also call on the Ugandan government to ensure the safety of the LGBTI community, including activists working to advance LGBTI rights.

We echo the call made by the Uganda Ugandan Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law that political and religious leaders abandon hate speech and fulfill their constitutional obligations to promote a political culture that unflinchingly promotes a human rights culture. As they did, MenEngage also calls on all religious leaders, whatever their denomination to promote love of one’s neighbour rather than narrow-minded bigotry. Religious fundamentalism has done much to make such a murder possible in Uganda.

The MenEngage Alliance also calls on the African Union to take action to prevent the routine violation of LGBTI rights, including taking a firm position against bills criminalizing homosexuality currently under review in a number of African countries. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter for Human and Peoples’ Rights, both extend equal rights and equal protection to all persons without distinction. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has ruled that this protection extends to sexual minorities. We call on the African Union to deliver on their commitments to protect the rights of LGBTI communities as outlined in the ICCPR and the African Charter for Human and Peoples’ Rights.

MenEngage country networks across Africa will deliver petitions to the Ugandan embassies and consulates in their respective countries and hold demonstrations calling for action from the Ugandan Government. For more information on how to participate in these activities, please follow up with the people listed below.

The MenEngage Alliance represents hundreds of organisations and thousands of individuals committed to achieving a more just and gender equitable world in which all
people can enjoy their full human rights. The MenEngage Alliance’s founding principles include a firm commitment to advancing the rights of LGBTI communities and the Alliance recognizes the link between homophobia and restrictive gender roles for women and men. More information on the MenEngage Alliance can be found at www.menengage.org.

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- Monica Mbaru, Proramme Coordinator Africa, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, mailto:mmbaru@iglhrc.org, 27 21 4693704 (office) and 27 729 284706 (cell).

Endorsing organisations:
1. Sonke Gender Justice Network, South Africa
2. Instituto Promundo, Brazil
3. EngenderHealth, USA
4. Men’s Resources International, USA
5. International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, South Africa
6. Men for Change, Mozambique
7. PADARE and the Zimbabwe MenEngage Country Network
8. Salud y Genero, Mexico
10. The Athena Network
11. Save the Children Laxman Belbase‘