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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell
House of Commons
London
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From the Secretary of State

Tessa,

Thank you for your letter of 19 January on behalf of your constituent about the anti-homosexuality bill that is being considered by the Ugandan Parliament.

The legislation is a private member's bill, which was introduced on 14 October and is currently at committee stage in Uganda's Parliament. However, following international pressure, the Ugandan Cabinet is currently debating certain clauses within the draft bill and there have been reports that they may not pass the bill into law in its present form.

We are very concerned about the bill and have made this clear in numerous representations to the Ugandan Government. Most recently, the Prime Minister raised the issue with Ugandan President Museveni at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad. Likewise, Baroness Kinnock raised the issue with the Ugandan Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sam Kutesa, also at CHOGM. The UK High Commissioner in Kampala takes every appropriate opportunity to engage Ugandan Ministers on this issue.

We have also lobbied through the EU. Sweden, who held the local EU Presidency in Uganda, led a EU demarche to the Ugandan Foreign Ministry in December. The European Parliament has also called on the Ugandan authorities not to approve the bill in a resolution passed on 17 December.

Our concerns include the negative impact the bill would have on the rights of homosexual and heterosexual Ugandans through the criminalisation of any action that could be construed as support for homosexuality. This could be extremely detrimental to the fight against HIV/AIDS in Uganda as, in theory, most donor agencies and international Non Governmental Organisations could be encompassed under this law. We are also concerned in particular by the introduction of the death penalty for some acts criminalised by the bill.

The UK is also in close touch with and is supporting Ugandan civil society organisations campaigning against the bill. We will continue to follow the passage of the bill and to lobby against its introduction.

David

DAVID MILIBAND