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Namibia: Gays and lesbians under attack

Amnesty International is concerned that recent statements made by President Sam Nujoma of Namibia may lead to the persecution of individuals identified as lesbian or gay and to further attacks on human rights groups advocating support for lesbian and gay rights.

"The Government of Namibia is obliged to fully protect the rights of all its people, including gays and lesbians. Public officials must not incite discrimination, hostility or violence against members of sexual minorities," stated Andrew Anderson, Amnesty International's Africa Program Director.

President Nujoma has frequently described lesbians and gays as "unnatural" and against the will of God. On 19 March, he told University of Namibia students that "The Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality, lesbianism here. Police are ordered to arrest you, and deport you and imprison you." Members of Nujoma's cabinet have reportedly made similar statements that homosexuals should be "eliminated" from Namibian society.

Amnesty International believes that the vilification and persecution of persons for their sexuality is a violation of their fundamental human rights. "Amnesty International considers those imprisoned for their sexual orientation, or for the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression and assembly, to be prisoners of conscience," added Andrew Anderson.

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