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Tutu urges Uganda to drop bid to jail gays and lesbians

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Religion News Service

NAIROBI, Kenya -- Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu on Tuesday (Dec. 4) urged Uganda to scrap a controversial draft law that would send gays and lesbians to jail and, some say, put them at risk of the death penalty.

The Anti-Homosexuality Bill is expected to become law after Parliamentary Speaker Rebecca Kadaga offered it to Ugandans as a "Christmas gift." The bill is believed to exclude the death penalty clause after international pressure forced its removal, but gay rights activists say much of it is still horrendous.

"I am opposed to discrimination, that is unfair discrimination, and would that I could persuade legislators in Uganda to drop their draft legislation, because I think it is totally unjust," Tutu told reporters here on Tuesday at the All Africa Conference of Churches meeting.

The former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, who was a hero of the anti-apartheid movement, has emerged as a leading pro-gay voice both in the church and across Africa.

With African church leaders passionately preaching against homosexuality as sinful and against African culture, Tutu said the church must stand with minorities.

"My brothers and sisters, you stood with people who were oppressed because of their skin color. If you are going to be true to the Lord you worship, you are also going to be there for the people who are being oppressed for something they can do nothing about: their sexual orientation," he said.

Tutu said people do not choose their sexual orientation, and would be crazy to choose homosexuality "when you expose yourself to so much hatred, even to the extent of being killed."

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