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Canterbury condemns Uganda's anti-gay law

by Daniel Burke by Religion News Service

After weeks of intense pressure from Episcopal gay rights groups, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has condemned the "shocking severity" of proposed anti-gay laws in Uganda.

The spiritual leader of the 77 million-member Anglican Communion also said that "I can't see how it could be supported by any Anglican who is committed to what the Communion has said in recent decades." Williams' comments were made during an interview published Saturday (Dec. 12) with *The Telegraph*, a British newspaper.

Williams had been heavily criticized by American gay rights advocates, particularly since he said the election of a lesbian as an Episcopal bishop in Los Angeles raised "very serious questions" about whether the Episcopal Church should remain a full member of the Anglican Communion.

"The Archbishop of Canterbury has failed to exercise moral leadership to protect gays and lesbians in Uganda and has instead exercised political pressure to attack a bishop-elect in Los Angeles because she is a lesbian," reads a statement from a Facebook page devoted to pressuring Williams. As of Monday (Dec. 14), the page had more than 4,530 members.

A number of U.S. religious leaders and gay rights groups have already condemned the proposed Ugandan laws, which would imprison gays and lesbians as well as people who counsel them. The Anglican Church of Uganda, however, has opposed only the proposed death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality."

The Anglican Communion, which includes both the Episcopal Church in the U.S. and the Anglican Church of Uganda, has been bitterly divided over homosexuality for years. Many conservative Anglicans, particularly in Uganda and other parts of Africa, view gays and lesbians as sinful.

The Lambeth Conference of the world's Anglican bishops in 1998 described homosexual practice as being

"incompatible with Scripture" but also condemned homophobia and "any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation."

On Dec. 9, Bishop Nelson Onono-Onweng of the Anglican Church of Uganda said the election of the Rev. Mary Glasspool, a lesbian, in Los Angeles, "signals the finishing of the Anglican Communion. We [in the Global South] will not be able to walk with the Americans."

In the *Telegraph* interview, Williams said Glasspool's election "confirms the feeling" that Episcopalians are "moving further from the Anglican consensus."

[Ecumenical News International contributed to this report.]

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