

Anti-gay law in Gabon passes first step to decriminalization

In a surprise move, less than a year after a new penal code criminalized homosexuality, Gabon's lower house of parliament voted to reverse the law that bans same sex relations.

RFI (24.06.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2NIKWpL> – The vote on Tuesday passed with 48 MPs voting to take the law off the books, while 24 voted against and 25 abstained from the vote.

While hailed by human rights leaders as a positive move, the bill must also pass in the upper house of the Senate before the law is taken off the books. If the Senate does not agree on the same terms, then the two houses must come together to agree on a text. The ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) has majority in the Senate, so it is not a given that the bill will be passed.

Homosexuality is against the law in Gabon, and that includes same-sex marriage. People who are caught can be punished with up to six months in prison and fines of up to 7,600 euros.

These laws, in addition to societal attitudes, have caused lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people to be excluded from society as well as caused discrimination and promoted fear.

Six African countries have scrapped their bans since 2012, marking a positive trend overall, said Neela Ghoshal, a researcher with Human Rights Watch told Reuters last December.

“It’s unfortunate that a lot of African countries have claimed and owned those homophobic, colonial values, but others haven’t,” said Ghoshal.

“In general, across the continent, things are moving more in the right direction than in the wrong direction ... I’m guessing you’ll see a lot of change in the next 10 years or so.”