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Gabon formally decriminalizes homosexuality

By Kaela Roeder

The Blade (08.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/30cF79Y> - Gabon on Tuesday decriminalized consensual same-sex sexual relations, becoming one of the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa to legalize them.

The Gabonese Senate on June 29 approved a bill to repeal a 2019 law that criminalized same-sex relationships by a maximum penalty of six months in prison and a 5 million Central African CFA franc (\$8,561) fine. President Ali Bongo Ondimba on Tuesday signed the repeal measure into law.

"I applaud the collective decision by Gabon's parliament, government and president to decriminalize same-sex sexual relations," said UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima in a press release. "By doing so, Gabon is righting a grave injustice inflicted on the LGBTI community in the country."

The initial proposal to legalize LGBTQ relationships was approved in the lower house of the Gabonese Parliament on June 24.

Reuters reported 59 members of the Gabonese Senate moved to revise the law, as opposed to 17 senators who voted against the reversal. Four senators abstained.

Angola and Lesotho are among the African countries that have decriminalized same-sex relationships in recent years, and LGBTQ rights advocates are demanding more to join.

"Today's historic signing of a law decriminalizing same-sex relations in Gabon is a pivotal moment in the global fight for LGBTQ rights," said Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David in a press release. "This critical win for basic human rights gives us reason to hope for more awareness and more victories across the continent."

Kenya and Uganda are among the 70 countries in which consensual same-sex sexual relations remain criminalized.

"It is shocking that over a third of the world's countries continue to criminalize same-sex love, in stark contrast to basic human dignity and international human rights standards," OutRight Action International Executive Director Jessica Stern in an Instagram post. "The decision in Gabon decreases the total number of countries criminalizing same-sex relations by one. This is not only an affirmation of the right of LGBTQ people in Gabon to love whom they choose, but also an inspiration to advocates in countries in which these bans still exist or are being considered."

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."
