

Gay Rights Speech

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By Val Kalende

Hello fellow Human rights activists, distinguished guests and all Ugandans. I am proud to stand before you as a lesbian today. With hearts full of love and the abiding faith in justice, we have come to this place to speak to Uganda. We have come to speak the truth of our lives and silence the liars. We have come to challenge the cowardly anti gay campaigners and state officials to end their paralysis and exercise moral leadership. We have come to defend our honor and win our equality. But most of all we have come in peace and with courage to say, "Uganda, this day marks the beginning of the end from exile of the gay and lesbian people. We are banished no more. We will wander the wilderness of despair no more. We will be afraid no more. For on this day, with love in our hearts, we have come out, and we have come out across Uganda to build a bridge of understanding, a bridge of progress, a bridge as solid as steel, a bridge to a land where no one suffers prejudice because of their sexual orientation, their race, their gender, their religion,
or their human difference."

I have been asked by the event organizers to speak in 15 minutes about the far right, the far right which threatens the construction of that bridge. The extreme right which has targeted every one of you and me for extinction. The supremacist right which seeks to redefine the very meaning of human rights. Language itself fails in this task, my friends, for to call our opponents "The Right," states a profound untruth. They are wrong - they are wrong morally, they are wrong spiritually, and they are wrong politically.

The Christian supremacists are wrong spiritually when they demonize us. They are wrong when they reduce the complexity and beauty of our spirit into a freak show. They are wrong spiritually, because, if we are the untouchables of Uganda -- if we are the untouchables -- then we are, as Mahatma Gandhi said, children of God. And as God's children we know that the God of our understanding, the God of goodness and love and righteousness, is right here with us today.

The supremacists who lead the anti-gay crusade are wrong morally. They are wrong because justice is moral, and prejudice is evil; because truth is moral and the lie of the closet is the real sin; because the claim of morality is a subtle sort of deception, a trick which hides the real aim which is much more secular. Christian supremacist leaders like Martin Ssempe, Stephen Langa, Solomon Male, Scot Lively, Caleb Brundidge and David Bahati don't care about morality, they care about power. They care about social control. And their goal, my friends, is the reconstruction of Ugandan Democracy into Ugandan Theocracy.

We who are gathered here today must prove the religious bigots wrong politically and we can do it. That is our challenge. You know they have made us into the enemies of Uganda's youth and children. And they say they have declared cultural war against us. It's war all right. It's a war about values. On one side are the values that everyone here stands for. Do you know what those values are? Traditional Ugandan values of democracy and freedom. Traditional Uganda values of both the heterosexual family and the homosexual family.

We believe in human rights for ALL, in many voices co-existing in peace, and people of all faiths living together in harmony under a common civil framework known as the Constitution of Uganda. Our opponents believe in hatred. We won the anti-gay struggle in South Africa. We won the big fight in Dehli, thanks to the hard work of all the people of India. And we are going to win our freedom in Uganda eventually.

To defeat the puritans politically, my friends, is our challenge when we leave this room. How can we do it? We've got to march from here into action at home. I challenge every one of you, straight or gay, who can hear my voice, to join the Ugandan LGBTI movement. I challenge you to join us to fight the spreaders of the gospel of hatred. We have got to match the power of the Christian supremacists, member for member, vote for vote, and shilling for shilling. I challenge each of you, don't just send a word of encouragement, but get involved in your movement. Get involved! Volunteer! Volunteer! Every local human rights organization in this country needs you. Every clinic, every gay person, every youth program needs you, needs your time and your love.

And I also challenge our straight liberal allies. I challenge and invite you to open your eyes and embrace us without fear. The gay rights movement is not a party. It is not lifestyle. It is not a hair style. It is not a fad or a fringe or a sickness. It is not about sin or salvation. The gay rights movement is an integral part of the Ugandan promise of freedom and fundamental change for all citizens.

When all of us who believe in freedom and diversity see this gathering, we see beauty and power. When our enemies see this gathering, they see the new dawn of a revolution. We call for the end of the world as we know it. We call for the end of homophobia and bigotry as we know it. For the end of violence and discrimination as we know it. For the end of religious fanaticism as we know it. We stand for freedom as we are yet to know it, and we will not be denied.