

## **Ghana: ICJ Calls on Ghanaian President to reject the Anti-LGBTIQ+ Bill**

Ghana's Parliament has recently adopted legislation that seeks to criminalize all real or imputed lesbian gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) persons, as well as those purportedly perceived to promote the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons.

In light of this, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) calls on President John Dramani Mahama to reject this Bill and ensure that Ghana's laws do not criminalize individuals solely on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. This Bill goes directly against Ghana's international human rights obligations of non-discrimination under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with the general principles of criminal law.

[The Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill](#) was passed by Ghana's parliament on 29 May 2026. The Bill imposes a minimum prison sentence of three years for consensual same-sex sexual acts and up to five years for "the promotion, sponsorship or support of LGBTIQ+ activities". It also introduces a "duty to report" prohibited acts to the police. Some exemptions are made for legal, media, and healthcare professionals who report on or provide legal/medical resources for LGBTIQ+ people. Ghana's Parliament had already adopted an earlier version of the Bill in February 2024. However, the former President of Ghana, Akufo-Addo, did not sign it into law due to legal and constitutional challenges. The legal challenges brought on the basis that the Bill violated fundamental constitutional rights were eventually dismissed by the Supreme Court because the Bill had not yet been signed into law. Fresh legal challenges are expected if the current Bill is signed into law.

The ICJ notes with concern the proximity of the Bill's passage to the beginning of the Fourth African Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Family, Sovereignty and Values – a large-scale, foreign-funded event focused on rolling back the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people across Africa. The event is scheduled to take place in Accra this week. The ICJ further draws attention to the growing pattern of political leaders mobilizing anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment to garner support by appealing to purported "cultures", "religions" and "national identities" portraying the human rights of LGBTIQ+ and LGBTIQ+ themselves as incompatible with African values.

Ghana's proposed legislation reflects a broader regional trend in which political actors have sought to advance increasingly restrictive measures targeting LGBTIQ+ persons. In Senegal, for example, the country's Parliament passed legislation earlier this year doubling the maximum prison sentence for consensual same-sex sexual acts from five to 10 years and extending criminalization to the "promotion" of homosexuality.

Kaajal Ramjathan-Keogh, ICJ's Africa Director, stated, "The persistence of these laws is often justified through the claim that queerness and gender diverse identities are

foreign impositions – Western-backed threats to African culture and sovereignty. This claim is historically inaccurate, as diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have long existed throughout the African continent. In fact, it's the criminal proscription of LGBTIQ+ people that is a colonial legacy and thus results from foreign influence. Many of the laws used to target LGBTIQ+ people in Africa today can be traced to colonial-era penal codes imposed by European powers, introducing restrictive moral frameworks onto legal systems that had no such provisions before colonization. Their persistence today reflects the unfinished business of decolonization.”

Some countries have begun to address this legacy. In 2019 in Botswana, [national courts struck down laws that criminalized consensual same-sex sexual relations](#), and the government has in March this year since formally removed the offending provisions from the Penal Code. Ghana's Parliament, by contrast, has chosen to deepen that colonial inheritance rather than dismantle it.

The ICJ reiterates that the [8 March Principles](#) affirm that consensual same sex sexual conduct may not be criminalized in any circumstance. The [Principles](#) further recognize that individuals should not face criminal punishment on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The [Campaign to Decriminalize Poverty & Status](#) similarly emphasizes the importance of decriminalizing laws that treat status, including sexual orientation, as a crime. If signed into law, Ghana's Bill would run counter to these values by imposing criminal punishment on LGBTIQ+ persons and those perceived to support them.

The ICJ emphasizes that while progressive legal reform is essential, the repeal of discriminatory laws alone is not enough. Ensuring that LGBTIQ+ people can live safely and with dignity requires broader socio-political and cultural changes that promote belonging, inclusion and equality among all members of society. Criminalization, like the Ghana Bill in question, directly obstructs that process.

President Mahama now has the opportunity to demonstrate Ghana's commitment to human rights and equality. The ICJ urges him not to sign the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill into law.

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