

February 14, 2014

(Resent February 24 with new signatories)

H.E Y.K Museveni, President  
Office of the President  
P.O. Box 7168 Kampala, Uganda

Dear President Museveni:

We, the undersigned psychological associations from around the world, are writing in response to media reports that you are committed to using scientific information about homosexuality as the basis for your decision regarding the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. As organizations devoted to the application of psychological science to help people and society, we commend you on your commitment to a scientific basis for laws. Further, we believe that an objective review of scientific information on homosexuality will lead you to the conclusion that the Anti-homosexuality Bill is inconsistent with science.

The media have reported your concern about the scientific research on whether lesbian, gay, and bisexual people choose their sexual orientation or not. Before addressing that issue, we would like to clarify how we understand the psychological construct *sexual orientation*. Sexual orientation refers to an enduring disposition to experience sexual, affectional, and/or romantic attractions to one or both sexes. It also encompasses an individual's sense of personal and social identity based on those attractions, on behaviors expressing those attractions, and on membership in a community of others who share those attractions and behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Although sexual orientation ranges along a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual, it is usually discussed in three categories: heterosexual (having sexual and romantic attraction primarily or exclusively to members of the other sex), homosexual (having sexual and romantic attraction primarily or exclusively to members of one's own sex), and bisexual (having a significant degree of sexual and romantic attraction to both sexes). Thus in considering the scientific evidence regarding homosexuality, it is important to consider that evidence within the larger frame of scientific evidence on sexual orientation, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

Science does not definitively understand the developmental sources of sexual orientation in humans. A number of scientific results suggest a biological basis for sexual orientation, but these results do not point to one simple biological or genetic explanation.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the best

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<sup>1</sup> A.R. D'Augelli, *Sexual Orientation*, in American Psychological Association, *Encyclopedia of Psychology* 260 (A.E. Kazdin ed., (2000); G.M. Herek, *Homosexuality*, in 2 The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology 774-76 (I.B. Weiner & W.E. Craighead eds., 4th ed. 2010); Institute of Medicine, *The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding* (2011).

<sup>2</sup> William Byne, *Biology and Sexual Minority Status*. In Ilan H. Meyer, and Mary E. Northridge, Eds., *The health of sexual minorities* (pp. 65-90). NY: Springer.

recent reviews of the scientific research relevant to this issue are found in a special issue of the journal *Frontiers of Neuroendocrinology*, the official journal of the International Neuroendocrine Federation and the American Neuroendocrine Society, that was published in April 2011<sup>3</sup>. The papers in the special issue make clear that substantial evidence exists in animals for biological bases of sexual partner preference based on sex. The papers also make clear that the kind of experimental sexual orientation research that scientists conduct with animals would be unethical if done with humans and thus the question of how the animal research generalizes to humans is an open question, one that may never be completely resolved.

We do have, however, good direct psychological evidence on this issue. Dr. Gregory M. Herek, a tenured professor on the psychology faculty of the University of California, Davis, surveyed a U.S. national probability sample of 662 self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults. Dr. Herek found that 88% of gay men and 68% of lesbians reported they had no choice at all about their sexual orientation, while another 7% of gay men and 15% of lesbians reported only a small amount of choice. Only 5% of gay men and 16% of lesbians felt they had a fair amount or a great deal of choice.<sup>4</sup> These results are not surprising; we believe that common sense would lead one to expect that heterosexual people would answer the same way.

An additional line of psychological evidence is the research on sexual orientation change efforts. Some groups and individuals have offered clinical interventions that purport to change sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. Scientific research has not shown these interventions to be effective. A review of the scientific literature by an American Psychological Association task force concluded that sexual orientation change efforts are unlikely to succeed and indeed can be harmful.<sup>5</sup>

We hope the evidence summarized above will be helpful to your decision, but we also want to encourage you to consider an even broader set of scientific evidence in making your decision. First, we respectfully ask you to consider the evidence that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are the subject of great prejudice and discrimination that is extremely harmful to them and reduces their capacity to contribute to society.<sup>6</sup> Second, we want to bring to your attention that scientific research has never found any differences between lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and heterosexual people that explains or justifies the animus toward them. In fact, whenever

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<sup>3</sup> Special Issue: Sexual differentiation of sexual behavior and its orientation. (2011). *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology*, 32(2).

<sup>4</sup> G. Herek et al., *Demographic, Psychological, and Social Characteristics of Self-Identified Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults in a US Probability Sample*, 7 Sexuality Research & Social Policy 176 (2010). See also G. Herek et al., *Internalized Stigma Among Sexual Minority Adults: Insights From a Social Psychological Perspective*, 56 J. Counseling Psychology. 32 (2009).

<sup>5</sup> American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. (2009) *Report of the Task force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. May be accessed at <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexual-orientation.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> G. Herek et al., *Demographic, Psychological, and Social Characteristics of Self-Identified Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults in a US Probability Sample*, 7 Sexuality Research & Social Policy 176 (2010).

comparisons have been studied, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have been found to have the same capacity to contribute to society as others do, including as parents and in families.<sup>7</sup> Third, we hope that you will consider the evidence that policies and practices that protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are beneficial. Such policies and practices protect lesbian, gay, and bisexual people from violence and discrimination, improve their health and well-being, increase their contribution to the economy, society, and culture, and promote intergroup contact that reduces prejudice against all minority groups in society.<sup>8</sup>

Based on the scientific evidence outlined above, we respectfully encourage you to reject the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, thereby affirming Uganda's commitment to human rights. We appreciate Uganda's liberatory ideology, for instance, demonstrated in the recent past in fighting against discrimination on the basis of race in apartheid South Africa. In the spirit of Ubuntu which promotes celebration of diversity in context, as well as that 'I am and that through you I become', we appeal to you to extend that stance to others who similarly are vulnerable to the detrimental effects of discrimination. Psychology can play a significant role in bringing about harmony, tolerance and the appreciation of differences. We thus offer to establish and continue a strong international link with Uganda in dealing appropriately with the concerns at hand, should this prove to be helpful.

International:

International Union of Psychological Science  
Interamerican Society of Psychology

National:

Psychological Society of South Africa  
Hungarian Psychological Association  
Hong Kong Psychological Society  
Guatemalan Psychological Association  
Colombian Psychological Society  
Association of Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Psychologies Europe  
American Psychological Association

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<sup>7</sup> Brief of the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the California Medical Association, the National Association of Social workers and its New York City and State chapters, and the New York Psychological Association as *Amici Curiae*, p. 8, *United States of America v. Edith Schlain Winsor, in her capacity as executor of the estate of Thea Clara Spyer, et al.*, (2013) (No.12-307); Psychological Society of South Africa, (2009). *An Open Statement from the Psychological Society of South Africa to the People and Leaders of Uganda Concerning The Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009*. Retrieved from

<http://www.psyssa.com/documents/Open%20Statement%20from%20PsySSA%2023-02-10.pdf>