

Beat: Vips

Obama warns Uganda over anti-gay law, says it will complicate;

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USPA News - U.S. President Barack Obama on Sunday warned Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni against signing a controversial bill that will further criminalize homosexuality in the East African country, saying the legislation will "complicate" relationships between the two countries. Obama issued the strong statement on Sunday afternoon while spending the holiday weekend in the resort city of Rancho Mirage in Southern California.

It came just hours after his Ugandan counterpart said he is "ready for battle" with gay activists and that he will soon sign the Anti-Homosexuality Bill that imposes a life sentence for "serial offenders." "We believe that people everywhere should be treated equally, with dignity and respect, and that they should have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, no matter who they are or whom they love. That is why I am so deeply disappointed that Uganda will shortly enact legislation that would criminalize homosexuality," Obama said. The president added: "The Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda, once law, will be more than an affront and a danger to the gay community in Uganda. It will be a step backward for all Ugandans and reflect poorly on Uganda's commitment to protecting the human rights of its people. It also will mark a serious setback for all those around the world who share a commitment to freedom, justice and equal rights." Obama added that the United States had conveyed to Museveni that enacting the anti-gay law will "complicate" relationships between Uganda and the United States. It was not immediately clear how the bill signing could damage ties between the two countries, but the U.S. is Uganda's largest donor, sending more than \$400 million in aid every year. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton also spoke out against the anti-gay law on Sunday, saying he is "strongly opposed" to the country's move to criminalize homosexuality. "It is a setback for personal freedom and equal rights and a rebuke to Uganda's own commitment to protecting the human rights of its people," he said, urging the Ugandan government to reverse its decision. Earlier on Sunday, Museveni said he would soon sign the anti-homosexuality bill because "there is no scientific proof" that homosexuality is the result of genetics. He warned that homosexual "exhibitionists," anyone promoting homosexuality, and anyone engaging in homosexuality "for mercenary reasons" will be "punished harshly." "There is no scientific proof yet that people are homosexuals by genetics. It is on the strength of that that I am going to sign the bill. I know we are going to have a big battle with the outside groups about this, but I will tell them what our scientists have to say," Museveni said on Sunday. The remarks followed a "scientific statement" from the country's health ministry earlier this month, concluding that no gene exists that is responsible for homosexuality and that homosexuality can be the result of environmental factors. It also noted, however, that homosexuality is "not a disease," "not an abnormality," and recognized that "reparative therapies" to change people's sexual orientation have been unsuccessful. "In my role as a strategist and a responsible leader for our country, there is no debate regarding the promotion of homosexuality," Museveni said earlier this week. "I totally agree with everybody that anybody who is promoting homosexuality, we must stop him. This must be stopped by law and harshly." Richard Tushemereirwe, Uganda's presidential advisor on science, also condemned homosexuals and said it was "wrong" to suggest a genetic link to justify homosexuality, saying such arguments could then be extended to justify drug addiction and abuse. "A homosexual person [is a] danger to himself and the public," he said, blaming homosexuality for having worsened sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea and HPV.

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