



Human Rights Watch

Oral Statement

Item 6 - Adoption of the UPR outcome of Cameroon

20 September 2013

In a context marked by severe violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and human rights defenders working with them, it is shameful that Cameroon has rejected nearly all recommendations related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Human Rights Watch is pleased to note, however, that Cameroon accepted Belgium's recommendation to investigate police violence against people on the basis of their sexual orientation. Our March 2013 report "Guilty By Association" shows how the security forces torture people so that they confess to having same-sex relationships. Cameroon should take immediate steps to hold these security officers responsible.

Cameroon also agreed to investigate threats and violence against human rights defenders. Accordingly, we hope to see rapid developments in investigations into the brutal killing of CAMFAIDS leader Eric Ohena Lembembe. We also expect Cameroon to investigate death threats against lawyers who defend LGBTI clients. These lawyers filed complaints last October, to no avail.

Unfortunately, Cameroon rejected common-sense recommendations that would ensure peoples' basic rights not to be killed, raped or assaulted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as Uruguay's recommendation to tackle harassment and violence based on sexual orientation, and Germany's recommendation to protect LGBTI people from violence. Cameroon has failed to uphold the basic principle that every person has the right to life and to security, and has distanced itself from a growing consensus, voiced by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the UN Human Rights Council, that discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity are never acceptable.

Cameroon also rejected recommendations to end its practice of arbitrary arrests for same-sex conduct. This practice makes it difficult for LGBTI victims, who are afraid they themselves will be arrested if they file police complaints, to seek justice. When lawyer Michel Togué, who represents LGBTI clients, complained about receiving death threats, police told him he should stop defending gays. Such comments make a mockery of basic principles of due process: that everyone has the right to a rigorous defense, and that every crime victim has a right to justice.

Cameroon's anti-homosexuality law violates its own constitution, as well as international law. Cameroon's claim that the law targets people who have sex in public is patently false. In 2013, at least six people have been convicted for homosexuality; not a single one was caught having sex. One man was convicted in 2011 for sending a romantic text message.

Its rejection of these recommendations ensures Cameroon will remain notorious for one of the highest levels of prosecutions for consensual same-sex conduct in the world, and for an unacceptable climate of violence against LGBTI people.