

info@jfga.org.uk



Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP  
Secretary of State for International Development  
1 Palace Street  
London  
SW1E 5HE

17 October 2011

Dear Mr Mitchell,

We have noted with admiration the support from the Department for International Development (DfID) led by you in sending the right signal to countries where human rights are violated, especially violence against and criminalization of gay people. Justice for Gay Africans (JfGA) is highly impressed with this move. However, we also have concerns.

Justice for Gay Africans is agreeable to withdrawing aid from corrupt governments where the ordinary citizens are not benefitting from the aid. We are also glad for the active measures the UK government is initiating to support equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) people across the world, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean.

However, we are extremely concerned that this move, if hinged on the issues of LGBT protection, would rather expose the said community to more danger than it would prevent. Of course we are very aware of the good intention of your department and the UK government as a whole. The fear, however, is that certain governments might claim that the 'gays has caused their donors to withdraw'. This sounds sad, but we saw this happen when Germany cut-off of aid to Malawi in 2010 following the cases Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, the gay couple who were prosecuted, jailed and subsequently released in that country in the same year. The backlash on the grassroots LGBT communities was severe and even took the form of physical violence and police detentions.

JfGA is a UK-based collaborative of activists, artists, academics and others with focus on sexual minorities of African descent in Africa and the diaspora. We work for change and improving dialogue through engaging policy-makers and contributing to decisions about us in the whole. We work with groups in African and Commonwealth countries and understanding the issues on the ground and how decisions in the general may affect them.

We would like to meet with you to discuss how issues that may directly affect our brothers and sisters in the affected countries may best be handled in the future. We do not want the good intentions of the UK government to yield the wrong results and worse still, hamper the work these groups are doing in the affected countries.

Our common social experience as Black people gives us the understanding of the societies we are talking about, in addition to our constant interaction with groups and individuals in these countries on the issue of criminalization of homosexuality.

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Our work with the Commonwealth Secretariat over the past two years has helped the Commonwealth understand more clearly the issues at hand in these countries, leading to the Secretary-General's (SG) public statement to the Commonwealth Lawyers Association meeting in Sydney, Australia in July this year. We have since met with the SG's office and discussed further ways of handling this delicate matter.

I hope that you will take advantage of our offer to contribute to the discussion and support the UK government in upholding human dignity across the world.

Thanking you in anticipation, I look forward to receiving your response and a proposed date for when we might meet with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Godwyns Onwuchekwa", written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Godwyns Onwuchekwa  
Chair