

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights

Presented to a nominee whose activities in human rights significantly impact education and the achievement of equal opportunity for those facing discrimination due to their sexual orientation.



Rev. Mark Kiyimba Yusuf
Non-Member, Uganda

In March, 2009, three American evangelical Christians arrived in Uganda to speak at a conference on homosexuality.

For three days, according to participants, thousands of Ugandans listened raptly to the Americans—Scott Lively, a missionary, Caleb Lee Brundidge, a self-described former gay man who leads “healing seminars,” and Don Schmierer, a member of Exodus International whose mission is “mobilizing the body of Christ to minister grace and truth to a world impacted by homosexuality.” They spoke about how “the gay movement is an evil institution whose goal is to defeat the marriage-based society and replace it with a culture of sexual promiscuity.”

Homophobia had already existed in Uganda, said human rights advocates, but the three evangelicals threw gasoline on the fire. According to Gay Ugandans, there has been an outburst of beatings, blackmail, and death threats like “Die Sodomite!” scrawled on their homes. To make matters worse, one Kampala newspaper has now begun printing the names and addresses of “known” homosexuals. And just one month after the visit of the three evangelicals, an Anti-Homosexuality bill was introduced into the Ugandan Parliament. The bill calls for life imprisonment or death for homosexuals.

Into this cauldron of hate has stepped an extraordinary man—the Rev. Mark Kiyimba Yusuf. He is the senior minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Uganda—the only church in the country that welcomes all people—gays and lesbians, blacks and whites, rich and poor. A former Pentecostal minister, Rev. Yusuf has preached the gospel of love. He has publicly opposed the attacks on gays and lesbians and denounced the Anti-Homosexuality bill. For his courage, He has received hundreds of death threats.

In his speeches and sermons in the U.S., Rev. Kiyimba Yusuf’s message has been: “You as westerners have the power to help us quench this terrible fire. We need you to speak to your evangelical ministers who have been spreading this hate speech. You can speak to your congressmen and women, and maybe they can help.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” Rev. Kiyimba Yusuf is the living embodiment of Dr. King’s words.