

Haiti: Gays Face Cultural, Religious, and Legal Barriers

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(<https://minustah.unmissions.org/ha%C3%Afti-les-homosexuels-face-aux-barri%C3%A8res-culturelles-religieuses-et-l%C3%A9gales>)

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“55 thousand”, the number of men having sexual relations with other men in the country, according to PSI-Haiti. Conclusion of a 2015 survey on HIV prevalence among the LGBTI community. Faced with discrimination and attacks, part of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex gather in an organization called “KOURAJ” (1). This association was created 5 years ago in a tireless struggle for the respect of their rights. A difficult task facing cultural, religious and legal barriers. “Haiti is not yet ready to legalize homosexual practices,” said Ronald Larèche, president of the National Assembly.

Fermathe, district of Kenscoff, 1500 meters above sea level on the heights of Port-au-Prince. The new place of refuge for Anderson Estinphil. This 22 year old boy, a student in Medical Biology, is gay. He left Nazon, his neighborhood, after strong verbal threats. A forced move after the announcement in September 2016 of the “LGBTI + Afro-Caribbean Film and Arts Festival MassiMadi (2) Haiti.” And since then, Anderson, known as “Etera,” lives here, at his friend's house, gay too. Effeminate since childhood, “Etera” admits to being attracted only by men.

In 2010, he attempted suicide twice because of harsh criticism against LGBTI people. According to him, homosexuality is not a disease as we would like to believe, it is rather homophobia that is one. “My sexual orientation does not disturb my Christian faith, but we tend to stray from all the activities of the Church.”

For the Protestant Church, "homosexuality is a sin against nature ..."

“We are not born Homo, we become it. It is a sexual vice,” judges Lemete Zephyr, head of the Ethical Commission of the Fédération Protestante d’Haiti (Protestant Federation of Haiti), FPH. The Evangelist admits that they are free to choose their sexual orientation, but there is no question of us imposing it as a social morality. Lemète Zephyr believes that legalizing homosexuality in Haiti would pave the way for sex tourism and social corruption.

However, Pastor Zephyr is against all forms of violence against LGBTI people, who must also enjoy their rights. According to the head of the FPH, gays can change. “We are ready to welcome them, help them change their way of life through prayer,” he says.

Homosexuality, “a serious attack on the ethical and anthropological foundations of life, family and education,” notes the Catholic Church

The announcement in September 2016 of the Massi-Madi Festival, caused many reactions, including protests. Representatives from several sectors raised their voices to say “NO” to this festival. The case of the Catholic Church, which fixes its position on homosexual practices in Haiti. In a note published a few days later, the Episcopal Conference of Haiti (CEH), gathering Bishops and Archbishops, emphasized the importance of marriage and the family in promoting moral, human and spiritual values.

“We recognize the promotion of the natural structure of the family - as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage. And marriage exists only between two people of different sex,” reads this note.

However, the CEH recalls that “according to the teaching of the Church, every person, regardless of their sexual situation must be respected in their dignity and received with compassion and sensitivity, with the care to avoid any mark of unfair discrimination and especially any form of aggression and violence.”

The Haitian Vodou opens his arms to Homosexuals, but ...

“They are not born that way. They are creatures of God. We do not judge. We respect their right,” said Euvonie Georges Auguste, Grand Servant at the National Confederation of Haitian Vodouisants. For Vodou, it is the well-being of the other that is important, not his sexual orientation. Mrs. Auguste admits that the Haitian society is not ready to accept the legalization of this practice. “In Haiti, there are moral values to respect. We received a Christian education, which generates prohibitions,” says the Vodou priestess, nevertheless evoking hypocrisy in Haitian society.

“Nearly 20 cases of physical aggression against registered Homos from January to October 2016”

In this heated debate, one organization gives the other story: fighting for the respect of the rights of the LGBT community in Haiti. Its name: “KOURAJ”. Created in 2011, one year after the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010, this organization is fighting a real fight against all forms of discrimination and prejudice against LGBTI people.

“Homosexuality is a sin, and so ...! How does it bother people?” asks the President of “KOURAJ.” Charlot Jeudy, 32, swears at the risk of his life, to intensify the battle against homophobia. For him, the fear of homosexual practices is a “false problem.” “Marriage for all ! We are not there yet! But no law condemns homosexuality in Haiti,” said the activist.

This festival has never happened. A ban stamped with the seal of the public prosecutor’s office of Port-au-Prince. Charlot Jeudy believes that the decision of the Government Commissioner is a violation of individual freedom, freedom of association and expression.

“The sustainable development of Haiti must go through the respect of individual rights,” says the head of KOURAJ. From January to October 2016, his association documented nearly 20 cases of physical aggression against homosexuals.

Is Haitian society ready to tolerate homosexuality?

“Masisi (3) and Madivin (4) are everywhere. They are present in all spheres of activity in Haiti,” stresses from the beginning, Ilionor Louis, doctor in Sociology. Is Haiti ready to tolerate or legalize homosexual practices? In any case the Haitian sociologist believes that this point of view is a value judgment. He is currently conducting a study on violence against sexual minorities in Haiti.

“The silence of Haitians to homosexuality is almost normal. But we must not forget that yesterday is not today, today is not yesterday, and tomorrow will not be today,” said Louis. For him, Haitian society, contrary to what we think, is preparing to accept sexual differences.

For his part, Antoine Hubert Louis, also a Haitian sociologist, social activist and cultural journalist, qualifies and responds differently. First, Louis reminds us that sexuality is a social construct. “Those who are hostile to this practice, have a social perception vis-à-vis the LGBT community. And Christian morality is for many,” he says.

Hubert recalls that in Haiti, homosexual practices are not new. In this sense, the sociologist says that the question is not whether society is ready, but the main component is the legal-legal aspect. “Haitian law does not allow marriage for all. At this stage, profound debates must be initiated on this social phenomenon, and the State will play an important role in this process.”

“Serious reflections must be made around this phenomenon ...”

Haitian human rights organizations are convinced that homosexuals are free to make their choice. “But these rights are not neutral. They evolve in given cultural social frameworks,” says the Plate-forme des Organisations Haïtiennes des Droits Humains (Platform of Haitian Organizations of Human Rights) (POHDH). The General Coordinator of the (POHDH) condemns all forms of violence against LGBTI people. Maxime nevertheless believes that “homosexuality can not be imposed under the human rights stamp.”

“There is danger!” esteems these organizations, which believe it is high time to reflect on the LGBTI community. To avoid a social breakdown, the human rights defender believes that the problem should be posed in society, in order to understand the reality. “The executive, legislative and judicial powers, the university, the church ... They must make their contribution, in order to agree on what we can accept or not in society,” added Rony Maxime.

A bill of law sanctioning the activities of homosexuals in public circles, tabled in parliament ...

LGBTI in the eye of the storm ... The issue of homosexuality is controversial in the Haitian parliament. Following discussions on the ban on the Massi-Madi Haiti Festival, a fight broke out between parliamentarians for or against respect for the rights of the LGBT community.

Beyond criticism through the media, anti-LGBTI parliamentarians go on the offensive. In early November 2016, Artibonite Senator Carl Murat Cantave, has submitted to the Senate of the Republic a proposal for a law sanctioning the activities of homosexuals in public circles. "We just have to prevent this community from gaining ground. We must prevent the depravity of youth. We must prevent the abomination in Haiti," the legislator fumed, less than 3 weeks before the filing of his proposal.

The President of the National Assembly does not compromise, he touches the wound of the finger. "Haiti is not ready and will never be ready to legalize homosexual practices. And no Haitian law allows homosexuality," said Senator Ronald Larèche.

In October 2016, l'Office de la Protection du Citoyen et de la Citoyenne (Office of Citizen Protection), a state organization, reminded that LGBTI people have the same rights as everyone else. "We can not use any form of prejudice based on tradition, cultural belief, religion and morality to justify violence against this class of people," the OPC wrote in a note.

In Haiti, intolerance is on the rise against homosexuals. In August 2013, the engagement of a gay couple in Port-au-Prince, was violently disturbed by residents. In the Haitian capital, several protests initiated by Christians took place during the last 3 years, to say "NO" to homosexuality.

Increasingly criticized or threatened, the LGBT community in Haiti continues to benefit from the support of several international organizations or institutions. The UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti, Gustavo Gallon, during his 6th mission to the country, condemned the threats suffered by this community during the year 2016.

The Ambassador of the European Union in Haiti, for his part, regretted that "women's rights and the rights of minorities, particularly the rights of homosexuals are still taboo in the country." At a ceremony in Port-au-Prince, marking the 68th anniversary of Human Rights Day, Vincent Degert lamented the lack of well-reasoned debates on these important issues for the development of human rights in Haiti.

In collaboration with the American Embassy in Haiti, the Creole section of "The Voice of America" (VOA), announced in July 2015, the broadcast on several media partners "Konprann mwen, renmen mwen" - (Understand me, love me) A radio program to show a unique perspective on Haitian society on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and

intersex Haitian people. This project announced on the Facebook page of the US Embassy has not lasted long, due to many criticisms from many sectors of national life.

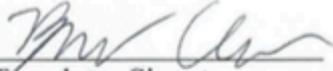
Under cover or openly, thousands of Haitians live with difficulty their homosexuality. Charlot Jeudy, leader of the organization "KOURAJ," does not intend to let go and dreams of living in a diversified society, where all citizens can fully enjoy their rights.

NOTES

1. KOURAJ: The name of the LGBTI community in Haiti, which means "courage" in French
2. Massi-Madi: Link between two words that designate Homos and Lesbians
3. Masisi: A word used in the Haitian Creole language to refer to homosexuals
4. Madivin: A word used in the Haitian Creole language to describe Lesbians

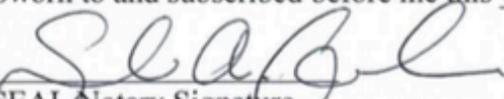
[Refer to the original article for other videos and other media elements.]

I Bryan Cleveland certify that I am fluent in English and French languages and that I have translated the attached documents to the best of my ability.


Translator Signature

July 26, 2018
Date

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of July, 2018.


SEAL Notary Signature

