

Haitian Senate Targets Homosexuals

By Agnès Gruda

(<http://www.lapresse.ca/international/amerique-latine/201708/08/01-5123071-le-senat-haitien-cible-les-homosexuels.php>)

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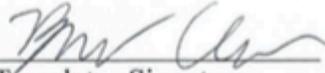
A week ago, the Haitian Senate passed an astonishing law, prohibiting a practice that had never previously been allowed: same-sex marriage.

In the same breath, senators have also prohibited any act likely to "promote homosexuality." Offenders would face up to three years in prison. This piece of legislation, still to be approved by a parliamentary vote, has taken everyone by surprise. Haiti was not in the throes of a gay marriage debate. In fact, the only sign of social tension surrounding the issue of gay rights was an LGBT festival project that eventually ended last year. "Senators then went to the wall to prevent the festival," said Frantz Duval, editor of the daily newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*, in Port-au-Prince. According to this journalist, it was the first sign of a battle waged by evangelical senators in the name of defending family values. The battle culminated last week with the law passed in the Senate. In reality, it is not a question of one, but of two laws, which will have the indirect effect of "criminalizing homosexuality," fears Charlot Jeudy, president of Kouraj, one of the rare organizations of defense of the rights of the homosexuals in Haiti. The other legislative aspect would deprive "proven" homosexuals of their Certificate of Morality, says Charlot Jeudy. However, this document may be required for admission to university, or to obtain certain jobs, especially in diplomacy or law enforcement, for example. The activist denounces these laws as unconstitutional because they violate the right to freedom of expression and association. He also believes that this anti-homosexual discourse is the result of the rise of evangelical groups, including those from the United States "with a lot of means" that preach homophobia. While finding it absurd that a country where a third of the population lives in extreme poverty takes the trouble to attack homosexuals, he also wonders about the scope of the prohibition to promote homosexuality. Could anyone supporting the rights of gay people end up in jail? "Does that mean we can not show up anymore? There is a lot of fear in our community. Young people call me and wonder if we can still move freely," worries Charlot Jeudy. Anyway, the president of Kouraj predicts that the LGBT community will have no choice but to "take shelter" if the law is eventually voted by parliamentarians - which seems likely. Because even if homosexuality finds its place in voodoo, no Haitian politician had the courage to support the militants of Kouraj in their battle, deplores Charlot Jeudy. As summarized by the journalist Frantz Duval: "No elected will dare to oppose the bill for fear of being charged as gay..."

Repression in Russia

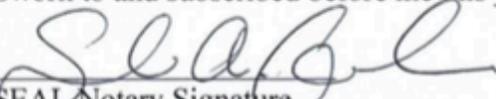
The Haitian bill is just one example of a country where LGBT rights have been declining for a year. At the top of the list is Russia, because of the fierce campaign against homosexuals in Chechnya, the republic of the Russian Federation. "Gay men and gay people are incarcerated and tortured," said Helen Kennedy, co-chair of ILGA, which publishes an annual compilation of the state of LGBT rights around the world. Russia and Haiti are the most egregious examples of these setbacks. But these rights are also declining in the United States, where more and more states are restricting the ability to adopt for same-sex couples. Elsewhere, gay rights also make gains. Thus, Germany has just allowed gay marriage - even if Chancellor Angela Merkel was openly against it. For Helen Kennedy, who also heads the Canadian NGO Egale, Ottawa has taken a big step forward with Bill C-16 to protect the rights of transgender people.

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

