

Pastoral Letter to Secretary of State

from Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson

January 8, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., N.W.,
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), I wish to thank and commend you for your recent statements and follow-up actions by the Department of State with respect to the proposed "anti-homosexuality bill" under discussion in Uganda.

The ELCA is gravely concerned that this measure, introduced last year by Ugandan member of parliament David Bahati, would, in certain cases, impose the death penalty for persons convicted of "aggravated homosexuality." Enactment of this kind of legislation would be an abhorrent injustice and outside the norms and standards of internationally-recognized human rights.

For the ELCA such an action would be inconsistent with various aspects of our church's social policy, such as the social statements, including "Death Penalty" (1991), "For Peace in God's World" (1995), and "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" (2009), as well as the 1993 Church Council action related to "harassment, assault, and discrimination due to sexual orientation," all of which affirm the foundational human dignity of each person created in the image of God.

We are particularly grateful for your comments at Georgetown University last month in which you stated that our government saw the proposed legislation as "a very serious potential violation of human rights" and that our government had "expressed our concerns directly, indirectly, and we will continue to do so" about this matter.

We wish to underscore your action and join those who support these ongoing efforts by our government to raise the matter with Ugandan government officials at every opportunity. We have noted media reports that the Ugandan parliament will reconvene in mid-February and have been encouraged to learn that a spokesperson for Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has indicated that Uganda "should not have an extreme position" such as in the proposed legislation.

The ELCA will continue to monitor developments relative to this proposed legislation and speak against its enactment.

Thank you for your consideration.

In God's grace,

Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America