

REDACTED

U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

_____)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
Abdallah WAMBERE)
_____)

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF APPLICATION FOR ASYLUM

I, Abdallah “John” Wambere, do declare the following:

1. My name is Abdallah Wambere, but I am better known by my friends as John or LongJones. I was born on November 2, 1972 in Mbale, Uganda. I am a citizen and national of Uganda.
2. I left my country for the last time for the United States on February 20, 2014. I last entered the United States after a brief visit to Brussels on March 29, 2014.
3. I submit this affidavit in support of my application for asylum. I am a Ugandan gay man and a well-known activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community, including those living with HIV, in Uganda. I have experienced persecution in the past in the forms of actual and threatened physical violence, detentions, severe harassment, and financial hardship on account of my actual and imputed membership in the particular social group of Ugandan LGBTI people, as well as on account of my political opinions supporting the rights and dignity of LGBTI individuals in Uganda and the world. Additionally, my Christianity is deeply important to me, is very much a source of strength in my life's journey, and has helped me accept myself as a gay man. These beliefs affirming the lives and spirit of LGBTI people are often in direct

REDACTED

conflict with the religiously-motivated anti-gay sentiment in my community and country of origin. My government is unable and unwilling to protect me from harm. In fact, my government actively supports the criminalization and persecution of LGBTI individuals in Uganda. Those who carry out anti-LGBTI violence in Uganda, be they public or private actors, commit their crimes with impunity.

4. On December 20, 2013, the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed by the Parliament of Uganda. The bill was signed into law by President Yoweri Museveni on February 24, 2014. This law imposed harsher penalties for same-sex relationships, including life imprisonment. It also imposes new penalties for any activities that are viewed as “aiding and abetting homosexuality” or “promoting homosexuality.” The law is broad in its reach and criminalizes activism and public health education work related to LGBTI individuals, including those living with HIV. I have experienced persecution in the past on account of my identity and activism. With the passage of this repressive law, I am certain that as a well-known Ugandan LGBTI and HIV activist who has been publicly targeted over the years, I will risk persecution in the future in the form of further physical violence or death by public and/or private actors, as well as life imprisonment by the government.
5. The decision to seek asylum has been a challenging one for me. I have made my life's work that of serving the LGBTI community in Uganda. However, at this time, I feel that risking life imprisonment, serious injury, or even death to continue my work in Uganda would actually be a disservice to my community. I hope to continue my work to change the laws and anti-LGBTI social attitudes in Uganda through public education and outreach from the United States.

6. I first realized my sexual attraction to other men when I was about eight years old.

Having no language for my feelings at the time, I kept these feelings to myself, hoping no one would become aware of my desires. I struggled with my emerging gay sexuality throughout my childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. While I reached a point where I could admit to myself that I was gay, the prospect of having this information known to others was terrifying. Living in an extremely anti-gay environment made me fear for my safety and the safety of my family should my sexuality become publicly known. I remember it was in the earlier part of 1998 when I finally realized that I simply needed to accept my sexuality for what it was and stop fearing disclosure at least among those I felt I could trust. A friend who had offered me counsel in a moment of deep confusion told me, "John, if what you do makes you happy, then do it." Those words affected me deeply and spoke to my conflict about my sexuality. I remember thinking of those words as well as my spiritual teachings as I washed my hands one day and looked at myself in the mirror. I realized that being gay made me happy because it is who I am. That was my truth, and that day, I washed my hands (and myself) of any notion of feeling sinful for who I am.

7. I was studying in Nairobi, Kenya at that time and began to meet other gay men in Nairobi. Slowly, I began to develop a community of friends there. I remember there would be informal social gatherings at a local bar with a gay owner. These events were transformative for me as I got to meet, for the first time, others who identified like me. Finding this community in Nairobi made me long for similar community back home. I began to want to know how to find other LGBTI people in my home of Kampala. When I would come back to Kampala on breaks from school, I turned to my connections in

REDACTED

Nairobi to connect me to venues that might be frequented by the gay community in Kampala. One of the venues I learned of was the garden at the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala.

8. I was so curious to learn who else in Kampala was part of the LGBTI community. I would go to the Sheraton Hotel garden and look out for others who I thought might be gay. At some point, I was approached by a man named Dan who struck up a conversation with me. Dan eventually asked if I was gay. I said I was. Dan was one of the founding members of Homo Uganda, an LGBTI organization in Kampala. This is how I was first introduced to LGBTI organizing in Uganda.
9. I have been a member of Homo Uganda since 2001. Homo Uganda was an organization founded in 1998 dedicated to working with men who have sex with men and HIV prevention. Homo Uganda provided HIV prevention care, support for HIV advocacy, and responds to emergency/security issues impacting LGBTI people in Uganda. In 2002, Homo Uganda changed its name to Spectrum Uganda Initiatives (Spectrum) because of the expected public backlash to the word “Homo,” but kept the same mission.
10. My work in Spectrum included dissemination of information on emergency security for LGBTI Ugandans who were detained by law enforcement, work to educate our LGBTI communities about our vulnerability to HIV, and generally providing social support on LGBTI issues. I would host Sunday gatherings at my home to talk about issues pertaining to our sexuality and health, discuss our experiences in our communities, and generally offer opportunities to meet and socialize with other members of community. In 2004,

REDACTED

members of Spectrum Uganda, including myself, held an election to choose the Board of Directors. During this election, I was elected to serve as the Secretary.

11. Because of my increased involvement and visibility within the LGBTI community, I was first outed as a gay man in a Ugandan newspaper, The Red Pepper, in 2005. In this article, my name, my place of work, and my home and work addresses were listed. In Uganda, the purpose of these public outings is to intentionally provoke public outrage and encourage persecution of those named in their articles. I felt shocked that my name and picture were in the newspaper. I was also scared because the newspaper article highlighted a part of me I generally concealed for safety concerns. From that point forward, I knew my life would never be the same.

12. Among other incidents, since 2005, I have been repeatedly outed as a gay man in Ugandan newspapers, which often depicted me as a feminine, dreadlocked homosexual who recruits young boys for sex. Each of these public outings have jeopardized my safety and those closest to me. As a result of these outings, I have been repeatedly evicted and/or forced to change my residence due to escalating severe harassment. I have also experienced the dramatic loss of my tourism and travel business, something I worked so hard for in life. I have received threatening emails and phone calls from people I do not know, threatening harm or even death. I remember some of these calls included phrases such as, "You homosexuals, we will deal with you. We know who you are. We know what you do." These individuals have personal information about me, including my phone number and email address. I will describe this escalating harassment in detail in my full affidavit to be submitted prior to my interview.

REDACTED

13. Among other things, in April or May 2009, I was physically attacked by several men as I was leaving a local bar in Kampala called Capital Pub. Before attacking me, one of the men looked at me and said, "Look at this homosexual selling himself." Several men then grabbed me from behind and I was knocked unconscious. When I awoke, I found myself in a friend's car with a chipped tooth. I was in shock after this incident and decided against seeking medical attention as I believed I could care for my own injuries. I chose not to involve the police as I feared my complaint would likely be met with indifference at best or contempt or harassment at worst. These fears are based on my direct experiences with the Ugandan police as well as my understanding of the way crimes against LGBTI victims are handled in Uganda.

14. In addition to the public outings, evictions, threats, attacks, and loss of business, I have also been repeatedly arrested for violation of Penal Code 145. Penal Code 145 criminalizes carnal acts against the order of nature, including homosexual behavior. I have been detained three times by Ugandan police for violations of Penal Code 145. Each of these times, I experienced harassment in the form of taunts by officer, was subjected to humiliation in the form of a psychological evaluation, and was only released after being extorted to pay large sums of money to the officers. In Uganda, sexuality and sexual expression put me at risk of arrest, humiliation, and imprisonment. I lived with this fear daily.

15. I ask that I be granted asylum in the United States. I have worked hard to promote the fundamental human rights of LGBTI individuals, including those living with HIV, in my country. The passage of the new Anti-Homosexuality Act was a shock and a blow to me. I, along with so many other activists, had held onto the hope that we would be able to

REDACTED

prevent the enactment of such a discriminatory and repressive law. While I am encouraged to carry on the struggle for equal rights for LGBTI people in Uganda, I fear that my return to my country will result in my imprisonment, physical harm, and/or death. Already, I know of several colleagues and friends who have been arrested under the Anti-Homosexuality Act since its enactment. Since arriving in the United States, I have continued to share the realities of LGBTI rights activism in Uganda with the hope that the sharing of my own story will help others in my country and beyond.

16. While the choice to leave Uganda has not been an easy one for me, I believe in my heart that applying for asylum in the United States is my only option. I will provide a more detailed statement of my experiences in Uganda prior to my interview.

Signed under the pains and penalties of perjury this 29th day of April 2014 in Boston, MA.



Abdallah Wambere