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GHANA: ‘This Is Bigger than Lgbtqi+ Rights – It’s about the Kind of Society We Want to Be’

By CIVICUS

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CIVICUS discusses Ghana’s anti-LGBTQI+ law with Leila Lariba, Executive Director of One Love Sisters Ghana, a community-driven organisation that advances human rights, social inclusion and wellbeing for Muslim LGBTQI+ people in Ghana.



On 29 May, Ghana’s parliament approved the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, which imposes prison terms of up to three years for people who identify as LGBTQI+ and three to five years for anyone deemed to promote, sponsor or support LGBTQI+ activities. With it, Ghana joins a growing group of West African states, including Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal, that have recently passed anti-LGBTQI+ laws.

What does the new bill do, and how different is it from the version parliament approved in 2024?

Parliament approved the new anti-LGBTQI+ bill on 29 May and it now awaits President John Dramani Mahama’s signature. The bill criminalises LGBTQI+ people and anyone perceived to support, advocate for or provide services to them. It reaches far beyond identity and relationships into the freedoms of association, education, expression, healthcare and human rights advocacy. I have worked directly with LGBTQI+ communities across Ghana for years and I see this not as a legal document but as a tool that legitimises discrimination.

The version parliament approved in 2024, which former president Nana Akufo-Addo left office without signing, was already one of the continent’s most restrictive. The new text keeps most of its harmful provisions. It comes at a moment when LGBTQI+ people already face heightened fear, insecurity and stigma, and it makes simply existing, seeking support or speaking about human rights a potential crime.

Why is the bill being pushed now, and who’s behind it?

The bill is being pushed by anti-rights groups that have increasingly turned LGBTQI+ people into a political target. As many Ghanaians struggle with economic hardship, unemployment and governance concerns, public attention is being redirected towards a small and already excluded community.

Behind it stands a coalition of political figures, conservative religious groups and traditional leaders who frame LGBTQI+ rights as a threat to culture and family values. This narrative ignores Ghana’s long history of diversity and the fact that LGBTQI+ people belong to every family, community and faith group in the country and the world.

Do you expect President Dramani to sign the bill, and what would the consequences be?

It’s uncertain whether President Dramani will sign. But the damage is already done. The prolonged public debate has fuelled fear, encouraged discrimination and left many people feeling less safe. Even before it becomes law, the bill has emboldened hostility.

At One Love Sisters Ghana, we have documented rising reports of blackmail, evictions, family rejection, mental health crises, online harassment and workplace discrimination. People are now afraid to seek healthcare, legal help and psychosocial support in case they are exposed or targeted. When fear becomes institutionalised, people stop seeking help precisely when they need it most.

The law would threaten fundamental rights and deepen the stigma, isolation and vulnerability of people who already face daily barriers. As a queer Muslim activist, I know what it means to navigate many layers of exclusion. Many LGBTQI+ people are balancing identity, faith, family and safety. This law would make that even harder.

The impact would reach beyond individual people. Community organisations, healthcare providers, human rights defenders and support networks would also face risk, making it harder for vulnerable people to reach essential services and protection.

How are LGBTQI+ groups, including your organisation, responding?

Ghana’s LGBTQI+ communities are remarkably resilient. Across the country, people are supporting one another, sharing information, strengthening their safety and keeping community ties alive.

At One Love Sisters Ghana, we focus on community care, protection and wellbeing. We have tightened safety and security measures, expanded psychosocial support, documented rights violations and kept referring people in crisis to the help they need.

We work closely with activists, community leaders, health professionals, lawyers and regional partners to track developments and keep people informed and supported. Through our national support systems, we keep hearing from people worried about their safety, livelihoods and future.

We also hold on to hope. Our communities have survived hard times before, and we keep building solidarity, caring for one another and advocating for dignity and human rights.

What further restrictions could follow, and what support do you need to prevent them?

Our greatest fear is that this law lays the groundwork for broader restrictions on civil society, free expression and human rights work. Organisations could face tighter scrutiny, activists greater risk and excluded groups even harder access to services.

To prevent further harm, we need sustained support from national, regional and international allies for community safety initiatives, emergency response, legal assistance, mental health services and the protection of human rights defenders.

International solidarity should be led by local communities and grounded in human rights. Allies should amplify local voices, back grassroots organisations and keep advocating for fundamental freedoms.

This is bigger than LGBTQI+ rights. It’s about the kind of society we want to be. Respect for human rights can’t be selective. When the rights of one group are restricted, it creates a precedent that can affect everyone.

As a queer Muslim feminist and human rights defender, I believe that dignity, freedom and safety belong to all people. The conversations happening today will shape the future of our democracy. I hope Ghana chooses compassion over fear, inclusion over exclusion and human dignity over discrimination.

CIVICUS interviews a wide range of civil society activists, experts and leaders to gather diverse perspectives on civil society action and current issues for publication on its CIVICUS Lens platform. The views expressed in interviews are the interviewees’ and do not necessarily reflect those of CIVICUS. Publication does not imply endorsement of interviewees or the organisations they represent.

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