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Nigeria must immediately release the more than 10 people already arrested under a deeply oppressive new law that runs roughshod over a range of human rights and discriminates based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity, Amnesty International said.

The arrests have been made in several Nigerian states such as Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Oyo states since Monday, when it was revealed that President Goodluck Jonathan had signed the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act into law.

"Those arrested under this draconian new legislation must be released immediately and the charges against them dropped. Locking someone up for their sexual orientation violates the most basic human rights standards," said Makmid Kamara, Amnesty International's Nigeria Researcher.

"Reports that the police in one state are apparently drawing up lists of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community to target are extremely worrying."

"The deeply repressive Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act must be withdrawn without delay. With the stroke of a pen, President Goodluck Jonathan has essentially turned Nigeria into one of the world's least tolerant societies."

This law is a throwback to the worst of the military rule-era when a range of human rights were treated with contempt. In a society where corruption is rampant, this law could also be used for harassment, extortion and blackmail of people by law enforcement officers and other members of the public.

Those targeted under the new law included five allegedly gay men who were arrested yesterday in Ibadan, Oyo state - they have since been released on bail. In the south-eastern city of Awka, Anambra state, six persons were reportedly arrested and detained by the police. Human rights defenders told Amnesty International that the arrests and intimidation of LGBTI people in Nigeria is expanding across the country.

Human rights defenders also told Amnesty International that police in northern Bauchi state have drawn up a list of 167 people targeted for arrest based on their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

An Assistant Commissioner of Police in Bauchi, confirmed to Amnesty International that the police have a list of suspected LGBTI people in Bauchi as part of their "profiling of criminals". He said: "The police have a list of suspected gay people under surveillance. We use the list to conduct our surveillance but the names on the list are not up to 167. We also use it to find out who their victims are."

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to stop all further arrests and put an immediate end to this witch-hunt.

The law criminalizes freedom of speech, association, and assembly and it criminalizes the activities of many human rights and civil society organizations. It provides for a ten year prison sentence for anyone who supports, meets with, or forms a group advocating for human rights for LGBTI people.

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