

Unedited interview of Martin Ssempe by Dr. Michael Brown on radio program “The Line of Fire”

B = Dr. Michael Brown

M = Martin Ssempe

(Key part of interview...Brown reads a written challenge from Jim Burroway posted on Box Turtle Bulletin, and Martin responds regarding death penalty provision and allegations of gays being killed or imprisoned):

B: Well, Ssempe is too cowardly to post the text of the bill on any of his websites and the truth is he can't because if he did those very words would show Ssempe's followers what exactly a compulsive liar he really is. He cannot post the bill he desperately hopes no one else reads it to learn what it actually says so. Let's straighten out the issue about not posting it that you'll have a link on the web site and I know trying to email you for weeks that I'd never hear from you because of internet problems so in any case here's the charge now. Part three of the bill: aggravated homosexuality and then it gives a list of what that would mean, all right; and we're commonly being told by Ugandan Christian leaders that the issue is pedophiles, child rapists or infecting someone with HIV knowingly, etc... or handicapped persons. So the question arises what if it's just two men who are living together, they're not out recruiting children, they're not raping anyone, they're living together, they're having sexual relations, are they serial offenders? Are they candidates for the death penalty?

M: I thank you so much Doctor just to respond, to put this into context. Number one, I believe in three governments which God has given us: the family, the Church, and the state. All of those have the role that they play. The family gives guidelines and trains the kids, the Church preaches grace and the way things should go and affirms the right way, and the state makes laws and punishes lawbreakers. In this case I am a preacher of grace and I am the one who gives, I affirm when the truth is upheld. The state is making the laws, just to qualify I am not the Parliament and I, we do not make the laws, the Parliament makes the

laws. Now coming to where we agree and disagree on this law is we deem there's a section of the law that is called aggravated homosexuality which talks about an aggravated offense of homosexuality where the victims are...a victim is a person who is below 18, or the victim is a person with disabilities, that is "a" and "e" in that section. Jim focuses on who the offender is; the person could be living with HIV, the person who is a guardian, the abuse of authority. In Uganda's law all other areas where the issue aggravated defilement has come in, it has to do with what you understand is statutory rape. It has to do with the rape of minors and so the punishment is stronger than just for this suggested punishment is the death penalty. Now where Jim focuses on and others is on the offender but I keep saying the offender must have a victim to complete the picture. If you have an offender who is living with HIV they have a victim. To summarize it all up is I agree with the recommendation that the death penalty is harsh. As pastors with God together we went over the bill as Uganda Joint Christian Council and said the death penalty is too strong, we suggested that it be removed and be reduced to twenty years with rehabilitation. Secondly we...

B: Just a second, we want that clear, your suggestion as pastors was that the death penalty even for aggravated homosexuality was too strong?

M: Yes.

B: And you suggested a 20-year imprisonment. So you're saying in the case of a guardian abusing someone that he is responsible for, that it would have been the death penalty the way the law has been framed by Parliament, but as pastors we're suggesting that was too harsh?

M: Yes, yes...actually just so you know this is a draft that has been given out and I think Jim might have an issue in the way the bill is written, it may mislead where they can come up and say that you have HIV/AIDS then you are guilty, but the argument with Jim and many others that one, we do not want a harsh law, we want a law that is modest and two, we have said that they should remove the death penalty. That is an input we have done as a legitimate group called

the Uganda Joint Christian Council that represents the major denominations. Number two we have stated that this aspect of aggravated homosexuality should clearly be about statutory rape of minors and nothing else. So when Jim brings up the issues of it's a person with HIV/AIDS who has had homosexual sex twice or you hear that the government is suggesting the government to go knock on doors and drag people out. Really that is not the spirit; I don't see that as the spirit but even if that is what's out we are against it. We think there is more, much stronger more important areas of this law than this aggravated defilement. I think this clearly to me it is being misrepresented to try and discredit the bill. So in summary: a - we are against the death penalty, we are specifically seeking to understand that this standard section is about statutory rape of minors and those who have authority over minors and abuse them.

B: I appreciate you making that clear and forthright. Just to change the subject but to give a broader perspective, right now fornication, sex outside of marriage, is that actually against the law in Uganda?

M: If you have sex with a child below 18, with a girl below 18 or boy below 18 it is punishable by up to life in prison. That is called defilement. Defilement has to do with age of consent. If you have sex with a girl, and 60 percent of the people in prison are in there for what they call defilement. So that is quite key and until recently we've had a law against adultery which unfortunately was struck down one year ago because it wasn't very gender balanced and they are reworking on it so it gives both equal punishment and responsibility both on the man and woman.

B: So again I raise those questions just so people understand Ugandan culture a little better. All right, 30 seconds before the break. You're saying you're not in favor of a witch hunt where you're going to find...

M: Absolutely, I don't think that people are, neither are we as ministers, we are against the witch hunt. We are for a law balanced between the compassion of providing opportunity for those who have been involved in it to be healed and treated as well as

the government having a strong law. I just want to let you know in the history of Uganda for the last 50 years we've had this law, since we've had a law against homosexuality, no homosexual has been arrested or killed for homosexuality.