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Malawi's LGBTQ's Short-Lived Freedom Inclusion

**By The Reverend Irene Monroe
BC Editorial Board**

I'd like to believe that Malawi's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) citizens and tourists had a few days to breathe easier. On November 5, the government issued a moratorium, suspending all laws criminalizing homosexuality. Three days later, on November 8, homosexuality was illegal again.

Had the moratorium held, Malawi's LGBTQ citizens, who constantly walk in fear and have increasingly been singled out, could not be arrested by police or be reported for engaging in same-gender consensual activity. Tourists would also be protected from arrest – usually, those accused of homosexual activity are expelled as “undesirable aliens.”

Malawians in opposition to the government's moratorium contest it was not driven by a change in heart toward its LGBTQ citizens, but rather the change was solely motivated to appease the country's Western donor nations, which to them is a present-day example of former colonialists interference, influence and dictate on African life.

Malawi's Justice Minister, Ralph Kasambara, publicly refuted his opponents' cynicism concerning the motive behind the moratorium by stating to the *Associated Press*, “if we continue arresting and prosecuting people based on the said laws and later such laws are found to be unconstitutional it would be an embarrassment to government.”

A few days later, Kasambara flip-flopped, stating to the *Daily Times*, "There was no such announcement and there was no discussion on same-sex marriage." Kasambara's reversal is a direct result of the Malawi Council of Churches cadre comprised of 24 homophobic churches that associate homosexuality with Satanism.

The country's traditionalists and religious conservatives did not like the world's interference in their business. They contend that homosexuality is an anathema to an African identity, cultural and family values; and it's one of the many ills white Europeans brought to the Motherland (a similar homophobic polemic still argued among religiously conservative African Americans). But if truth be told, criminalizing homosexuality in Malawi is a by-product of British colonialism. Nonetheless, the debate between "authentically African" and Western colonial remnants always finds some way to dispute the reality of black LGBTQ existence. Malawi is not alone - thirty-eight of fifty-four countries in the African continent criminalize same-gender consensual activity.

Malawi's anti-gay laws are some of the world's toughest edicts criminalizing homosexuality so, understandably, the moratorium sent shock waves throughout the country and around the world.

Case in point, the infamous Malawi couple Steven Monjeza, a gay man, and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, a transwoman, who were sentenced to 14 years hard labor on charges of homosexuality in 2010. An international outcry and presidential pardon by Bingu wa Mutharika brought about their release.

Malawi got its independence from the British Commonwealth in 1964, but it hasn't from the church. The church willfully operates under colonial rule with its ecclesiastical edicts toward its LGBTQ brethren. The country's justice minister should not have, too.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member and Columnist, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. She is the Coordinator of the African-American Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. She was recently named to MSNBC's list of [10 Black Women You Should Know](#). Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your](#)

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