

# FRANK MUGISHA

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In a country of 33 million people, Frank Mugisha is one of the few openly gay activists in Uganda. As a spokesperson for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBT) individuals, Mr. Mugisha advocates against Anti-Homosexuality legislation. In 2007, Mr. Mugisha was chosen to co-lead Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), a coalition of LGBT human rights organizations. As a result of his public advocacy, Mr. Mugisha has lost jobs, friends and has become estranged from members of his family. A close colleague and co-head of SMUG, David Kato, was brutally murdered in his home after being outed in a local newspaper. Undeterred by threats of violence, Frank stayed on at SMUG and continues to amplify the aspirations of Uganda's most vulnerable communities. In 2011, Frank Mugisha received the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights award. Following this honor, Mugisha continued his advocacy, and in 2012, his organization, SMUG, helped to create the first Ugandan LGBT health clinic.



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“ THE MOMENT YOU COME OUT AND SAY YOU ARE GAY IN UGANDA ,  
THE DISCRIMINATION BEGINS.”

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AN EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY KERRY KENNEDY IN 2000

I was six or seven years old when I realized I was attracted to people of my own sex. I thought I was alone. There were all sorts of bad names for homosexuals. But the way people talked wasn't relating to who I was. I am a good person. I could not tell anyone for the fear that I would get all the bad names. As my understanding grew, I would see people expelled from school for rumors of being homosexuals. When the expelled students went home, their fathers threatened to kill them or their families threw them out of the house. Sometimes the expelled student would be sent to live with grandparents in the village and do farming. His education ended. My fear increased.

I had so many dreams. I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer. If I got kicked out of school, I could never become a lawyer or a doctor. I decided that I would never tell anyone. So I tried to fit in and be like my other colleagues. I tried to change myself. I would pray to God. It wasn't working. At 14, I decided to tell someone because I couldn't keep it in anymore. I only told friends who were very close to me, but I lost very many friends. And the rumor was spread in school that I was a homosexual. The disciplinary committee asked me if I was a homosexual. I couldn't say yes or no. I just went quiet and cried. So they told me to bring my parent.

I didn't tell my mother that I was a homosexual. I told her that the school thinks I am a homosexual. She didn't ask me anything. She came to school, and I was excused from the meeting. When they called me back into the meeting, the school said that my discipline track record was the best. I was also a prefect so I was excused. I felt good about it. Now they know and they didn't expel me. So I can still go on and tell people. I told my brother, and he just laughed about it. And for me that was good. But he didn't keep quiet. He started telling everyone.

A year later my mother took me to talk to a religious leader in Uganda, and he started quoting verses in the bible. The things he was telling me, strange things, were not relating to me at all. I wanted someone to tell me something that relates to what I am feeling inside. I told my mom that I wish I was made out of bricks because bricks are there, and no one hurts them—bricks just build houses. Why didn't God create me into something that is never harassed? Why do I have to endure all this? I believe in God. I can recite the rosary from my head. I am not being rebellious or committing sins. This is happening to me because I have no control over it.

That is the reason I tried so hard to change myself. Because I believed homosexuality could be a sin. A friend said that I was going to go to hell. And I thought to myself, what should I do to change this?

When I started understanding that I cannot change myself and that I loved my religion, I decided not to listen to people. What they were telling me wasn't what I felt inside. At some point I thought that maybe prayer was affecting me, so I stopped praying. But it was very difficult to wake up one morning and wash religion out of

my head. I am what I am and that's it.

Becoming an activist was a gradual process for me. Every time I met a Ugandan person and was able to change his mind about homosexuality, it made me want to continue. I have to work very hard and speak out to make a change. Maybe out of 33 million Ugandans I can reach seven. Maybe at some point I can reach 15 million. And maybe years to come, someone will pick up from where I left off. But at least I have paved the avenue to understanding.

Just appearing on television in Uganda and speaking out helps many people accept themselves. They know they are not alone in the world. They know there is a voice out there for them. That is where I get my courage: knowing that every day of my life, every minute of my life, I make a very small difference, but that small difference has a huge impact on so many different people.

For activists like myself the Ugandans are our biggest threats. The moment you come out and say you are gay in Uganda, the discrimination begins. Friends and family reject you. Employers throw you out of your job. You never know who is going to harass you, bully you, attack you in the streets, or even arrest you. I can't go shopping. I don't know if it is safe to use public transportation. Before I leave my house I have to calculate – will I be safe? Should I go anywhere or should I just stay home? Everyday someone will call me to say a friend has been arrested or beaten or thrown out of his house for being gay.

There are many homosexuals who have been arrested in Uganda and tortured while in jail. People have been beaten on the streets. Villagers break into houses of suspected homosexuals and beat the person up or take him to prison and tell the authorities he's a homosexual. Lesbian girls are raped by their own relatives. The family will ask an uncle to rape the girl and teach her to be a woman. The girl will be raped almost every night. And some girls have to leave their families because they can't live there anymore and run away, maybe in the middle of the night, run off to nowhere, to the streets.

There is discrimination when gay men seek out health care services. I lost a friend who was living with HIV. He died in a hospital. But the reason he died was because he was afraid to tell the doctors he was gay. If he told the doctors they would leave him alone and not talk to him. If he told his family, they would not help him. He was in the hospital alone, so I talked to the doctors so they would give him the right medication. But the reaction wasn't good. He was put off the bed to the floor. If it wasn't for the fear and the stigma, he wouldn't have died.

One of the reasons we do activism and create visibility is to try and stop the media from outing people. If the media want our faces, we're here. We'll show our faces and tell you the truth about our sexuality. But stop outing people who are not ready to be out. A tabloid newspaper called Red Pepper started outing people. They named people and included their home addresses and places where they worked. But the worst was a Ugandan tabloid called Rolling Stone which published names and photos with headlines

that homosexuals need to be killed. When the article came out, almost everyone who appeared in the paper was harassed. We had to stop it. We asked and begged the media to respect people, but they refused. So we took them to court. Fortunately, the court ruled that publishing the names of people who are perceived to be homosexual is an invasion of privacy. Rolling Stone keeps publishing articles filled with misinformation, but they can't publish names and pictures anymore.

My colleague, David Kato, was murdered after his picture was published in the paper. Murdered in his home in his own bed at night. No one knows who did it or why. I think about it all the time. David once told me that he couldn't live if he wasn't doing activism. I don't know if I would live if I wasn't doing activism. I go through a lot of challenges, and all those images come back to me. I am driven by the images. I am driven by the stories of the people I've met. I want to see change happen within the next few hours.

# LGBT RIGHTS AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

## FRANK MUGISHA

LESSON GRADE LEVEL: 9-12  
HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES: EQUALITY, FREEDOM, SAFETY, PRIVACY,  
RESPECT

### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

- **Article 1:** All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the UDHR
- **Article 3:** Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person
- **Article 7:** All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law
- **Article 12:** Everyone has the right to privacy

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How do economic, political, civil, social and cultural factors impact the lives of citizens in Uganda?
- What happens when cultural values are in conflict with rights?
- What type of leadership brings about societal change?

### TIME REQUIREMENT:

Four 45 minute classes

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Find Uganda on the map of Africa.
- Examine and understand how human rights manifest itself in the context of the lives of Ugandan citizens.
- Understand the climate in which Frank works to bring about change.
- Analyze tactics for bringing about change for marginalized people in a society.
- Compare and contrast transitional leaders who brought about social change in the area of human rights, from a historical and current day context.

### STUDENT SKILLS:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Comparing and contrasting
- Analyzing information
- Drawing inferences and making conclusions

### COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RH.9-10.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RH.9-10.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RH.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RH.11-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. WHST.9-10.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. WHST.9-10.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. WHST.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. WHST.11-12.2

### MATERIALS:

- Frank Mugisha's interview [www.RFKHumanRights.org](http://www.RFKHumanRights.org) / Click on Speak Truth to Power / Click on "Defender" tab
- Clip from Frank's organization <https://sexualminoritiesuganda.com/smug-ed-message-for-idahot-2015/>
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
- Handout #1 Legislative, Attitudinal and Taking Action [www.rfkhumanrights.org](http://www.rfkhumanrights.org) / click on Speak Truth to Power / click on "Defenders" tab - Handout #1 will be in
- Frank's profile

### VOCABULARY:

- LGBT
- Equality
- Legislative
- Attitudinal
- "to out"
- Mob Justice
- Draconian
- Homophobia
- Homosexuality
- Sexual orientation
- Gender Identity
- Transformative Leadership
- Cultural context
- Civil context

### CONCEPTS:

- Empathy
- Fairness
- Justice
- Values
- Cultural Norms
- Systemic Change

### TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED:

- Internet access
- Computer access

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

### ANTICIPATORY SET:

- Locate Uganda on a map
- Starting with the following two videos, research the cultural, religious, economic, political and civil context in current day Uganda.
  - This is a 20 minute BBC documentary.
  - The host of the documentary looks at a wider Ugandan perspective, providing more of a historical context.
- **Clip 1:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-HfARzLWYk&index=1&list=PLAC9F5A34B69AF1A5>
- This clip examines the culture of Uganda, covers the western vs sub Saharan African ideology clash and focuses on the church's role in suppressing LGBT rights. **Clip 2:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLvHqogIOLY&feature=channel&list=UL>
- In groups, ask the students to put check marks next to the articles of the UDHR that they think are being violated in Uganda.
- Have students select three rights and write a paragraph about the right being violated as it impacts Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.
- Read Frank Mugisha's interview and watch the selected clip.
  - Ask each student to write three challenges that they think Frank faces in his work for the human rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Uganda.
  - Suggested video clip to watch "Gays Abandoned" 22min [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M\\_WgQPJdQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M_WgQPJdQ)

### ACTIVITY 1:

#### NOTE TO TEACHERS:

THE STUDENTS HAVE TO HAVE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOVEMENTS REFERENCED IN THIS ACTIVITY IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE ACTIVITY. IF THEY HAVE STUDIED OTHER MOVEMENTS, FEEL FREE TO INCLUDE THOSE MOVEMENTS IN THIS ACTIVITY.

- Have the students research one of the following social movements and write a paper responding to the questions noted below:
  - Civil Rights movement
  - Farm workers movement
  - Women's Rights movement
  - Labor movement
- Explain to the students that they will evaluate different ways to bring about political and civil change.
- Give each group an envelope containing a set of statements from Handout #1 focusing on bringing about change from 3 different approaches: Legislative, Attitudinal and by Taking Action.

#### NOTE TO TEACHERS:

STATEMENTS SHOULD BE CUT INTO STRIPS AND MIXED TOGETHER BEFORE BEING PUT IN THE ENVELOPE. IF A TEACHER FEELS ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS ARE NEEDED, THEY SHOULD BE INCLUDED. IF STUDENTS ASK WHY THE STATEMENTS ARE PRINTED ON DIFFERENT COLORED PAPER, LET THEM KNOW YOU WILL TELL THEM WHY AT THE END OF THE ACTIVITY.

- Each group should also have one sheet of flip chart paper. The paper should be held lengthwise and divided into three columns. The columns should be headed: Essential, Useful, and Irrelevant.
- As the group members read each statement, they should try to place it in what they agree is the appropriate column.
- Students should be answering the question:
  - In achieving success for the selected movement, Civil Rights, Farm workers, Women's or Labor which actions are essential, which are useful, and which are irrelevant?
- When the group cannot agree, they should save that statement until they have placed the ones about which they can agree. They should then discuss the remaining statements and try to place them under the Essential, Useful, and Irrelevant columns.
- Each group should try to reach a consensus. Members may alter the wording of a statement if it helps them to reach consensus. Blank slips of paper can be used to create additional statements if needed. When all the statements have been placed on the newsprint, they can be taped in place.
- Groups should be allowed time to look at each other's finished sheets and to identify differences in priorities.
- Groups should then return to their own sheet and note whether there is any pattern to how they have placed the different colored statements. At this time, the teacher should draw attention to the significance of the different colors on which the statements are printed.
- Point out to the students that statements printed on white paper are about changing laws to bring about change. Statements printed on blue paper are about changing people's attitudes to bring about change, while the statements printed on yellow paper are about In general, what ideas or concerns guided you as you placed the statements under the three columns?
- Point out to students that their answers to this question reveal their theories about how to bring about change for equal human rights.
  - Was there a pattern for or against changing legislation, changing attitudes, or taking direct action?
  - Why do you have preferences for working towards change in certain ways?
- As a class, debrief the outcomes of the group discussions. Examine the similarities and differences between the group outcomes and respond to the following questions:  
How did the human rights being addressed by the specific movement impact the decision to take one approach or another?
  - What were some approaches or strategies that applied to all the movements?
  - What were some approaches or strategies that did not apply to any of the movements?
- Have each student write a one page reflection on the activity.

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

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### NOTE TO TEACHERS:

MAKE CLEAR TO STUDENTS THAT THERE IS NO SINGLE, RIGHT WAY TO WORK TOWARDS CHANGE. THE GOAL OF THE EXERCISE IS NOT TO DETERMINE WHICH METHOD OF WORKING FOR CHANGE IS BEST. IN FACT, STUDENTS MAY POINT OUT THE SYMBIOTIC CONNECTION, FOR EXAMPLE, BETWEEN CHANGING LEGISLATION TO CHANGE ATTITUDES AND THE NEED TO CHANGE ATTITUDES TO CHANGE LEGISLATION. IF ANYTHING, THE ACTIVITY SHOULD HELP STUDENTS APPRECIATE THAT ALL THREE STRATEGIES ARE IMPORTANT AND THAT THE GOAL IS NOT TO CHOOSE ONE BUT TO BALANCE ALL THREE.

### ACTIVITY 2:

- Ask the groups to now view the movement they selected from the perspective of the movements leadership.
- Ask the students to select at least 1 and no more than 3 leaders of their selected movement: Civil Rights, Farm workers, Women's or Labor.
- Then have the students write down characteristics of the movements' leaders on a slip of paper. Encourage them to include as many as possible.
- Using flip chart with the same three categories, Essential, Useful, Irrelevant have the students repeat the same process as Activity #1.
- The students should be answering the following questions:
  - In order for a movement to achieve success, which leadership characteristics are essential, which are useful, and which are irrelevant?
- As a class, have the students share their outcomes and respond to the following questions:
  - Were there any similarities among the leader characteristics?
  - Did a group identify a characteristic that other groups did not? Discuss.
- Have each student write a one page reflection on the activity.

### CULMINATING ACTIVITY:

- As a class, review the outcomes of the first two activities.
- Form new groups and ask students to share both of their reflections.
- As a group, consider the case of Frank Mugisha and his work in Uganda. Have each group create a Plan for change in Uganda and have them consider the following points:
  - The political and cultural climate in Uganda.
  - The influence of actors such as the African Union, European Union, U.S., civil society or religious communities.
- Students should include at least two actions in their plan. Examples include
  - Circulate a petition calling for the support of the LGBT community in Uganda.
  - Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper in support of LGBT rights globally.
  - Host an educational program about LGBT human rights and include a letter writing effort.
  - Raise funds for LGBT organizations like SMUG.
  - Post a video on a social media site about the LGBT situation in Uganda and how people can help.
- Ask each group to present their plan either through a power point, flip chart or oral presentation. The groups should highlight the legislative, attitudinal and taking action elements of their plan.
- As a class discuss the similarities and differences in the Plans and discuss the leadership characteristics the students believe are necessary to carry out the plan.

## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

Since the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, many other international documents—also called treaties, covenants, resolutions, or conventions—have been drafted to develop these rights further. Countries commit to protect the rights recognized in these treaties by ‘ratifying’ them and sometimes a specific institution is created within the UN to monitor their compliance.

Here are examples of relevant international documents:

### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

- **Article 2:** Prohibition of discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
- **Article 6:** right to life
- **Article 7:** prohibition of torture

- **Article 9:** right to liberty and security of persons
- **Article 10:** right to dignity and be treated with humanity
- **Article 17:** protection of privacy, prohibition of unlawful interference with privacy, family
- **Article 18:** freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- **Article 19:** right to hold opinion without interference and to freely express it

### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

### CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

For more information, visit the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ website: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)

## BECOME A DEFENDER

- Ask each student to write a one page reflection on creating change in Uganda. Students should consider how they can play a role in supporting Frank and the needed change in Uganda. Have the students select at least two to three action items to implement. Ask the students to document their experience and outcomes.
- Have the students consider the action ideas or tactics listed in the culminating activity. As well, students should consider the following:
  - Host a movie night with a panel discussion addressing LGBT rights or another human right highlighted in the *Speak Truth To Power* curriculum.
  - Table at an area shopping center, providing information about the situation in Uganda or about the human rights issue you are focusing on. Make sure to always include an action—a petition or letter writing opportunity.
  - Invite local leaders to participate in a panel discussion about LGBTI rights in your community and/or globally.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### SMUG

<http://www.smug.4t.com>

Sexual Minorities Uganda [SM-UG] is a non-profit, nongovernmental organization that works towards achieving full legal and social equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people in Uganda. It is the umbrella organization of all homosexual organizations in Uganda.

### GLSEN

<http://www.glsen.org>

The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community. We welcome any and all individuals as members, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or occupation, who are committed to seeing this philosophy realized in K-12 schools.

### Call Me Kuchu

<http://callmekuchu.com>

Call Me Kuchu is a documentary film about the struggle for human rights in Uganda: In Uganda, a new bill threatens to make homosexuality punishable by death. David Kato, Uganda’s first openly gay man, and retired Anglican Bishop Christopher Senyonjo

work against the clock to defeat state-sanctioned homophobia while combatting vicious persecution in their daily lives. But no one is prepared for the brutal murder that shakes their movement to its core and sends shock waves around the world.

### Human Rights Campaign

<http://www.hrc.org>

Founded in 1980, HRC advocates on behalf of LGBT Americans, mobilizes grassroots actions in diverse communities, invests strategically to elect fair-minded individuals to office and educates the public about LGBT issues.

### Yogyakarta Principles

[www.yogyakartaprinciples.org](http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org)

The Yogyakarta Principles address a broad range of international human rights standards and their application to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

### International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

[www.ilga.org](http://www.ilga.org)

ILGA is a worldwide federation of 1100 member organizations from 110 countries campaigning for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex rights. This website has an interactive map that displays LGBT legislation around the world.