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PANEL Nº 14

PANEL TITLE:

Citizenship and African Struggles: Limited spaces and activism of African sexual minorities

CHAIR:

Rui Garrido (CEI / ISCTE - IUL; Human Rights Center for Interdisciplinary Research, DH-CII)

KEYWORDS:

Citizenship; Human Rights; LGBTI; Activism; Africa

ABSTRACT:

The legal, social and political landscapes in some African countries are very repressive for sexual minorities. Deemed as *unAfrican*, *unnatural* and *foreign*, homosexuality in Africa still a taboo. The continent is profoundly divided, with the Republic of South Africa taking the lead as a State who fully recognizes the full citizenship of its citizens, despite their sexuality, and other States taking steps in a path of darkness for its sexual minorities. The same friction and resistance dominates the political landscape of African Union institutions, including those devoted to human rights protection.

In fact, some African States have endeavoured for a homophobic drift, producing legislation that further criminalizes the consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex. It's the case of Uganda, Nigeria or The Gambia. The State homophobia constrains the public space for non-heteronormative individuals, who are perceived as a threat to society and moral values. As a result, the citizenship of sexual minorities in African societies is limited as these people are outlawed by the its State. The access to basic public services, as education, health care, or social protection is limited or refused as people are perceived as gay or lesbian. Seeking protection of the State in case of harassment, blackmail, physical or psychological violence is not an option for these people. LGBTI people are, by so, a "*second-*

class" citizens as they express their sexuality in the public sphere. Moral values, and the colonial *sodomy laws* are also alleged by the State for non-recognition of associations working with the human rights of LGBTI people.

Against these adverse environment, sexual minorities struggle for survival as citizens - and sexual citizens -, claiming for the State obligations of recognition, protection and non-discrimination under constitutional law and international human rights commitments.

These panel seeks to understand the struggles of African sexual minorities, the constraints they suffer, responses and activism.