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Senegal: The attitude of Senegalese society toward Senegalese homosexuals; protection offered (2003 - 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Homosexuality is still prohibited in Senegal (Behind the Mask n.d.; Canada 11 Dec. 2005). Under the Senegalese Penal Code, this practice is punishable by a prison term of one to five years and a fine of 100,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (*ibid.*; Behind the Mask n.d). If the act is committed with a minor (someone under 21 years of age), the maximum prison sentence will be imposed (*ibid.*; Canada 11 Dec. 2005).

In a country that is 95 per cent Muslim (UN 28 Nov. 2005), where [translation] "conservative values and strict respect for the Koran mean problems for those involved in 'unacceptable' sexual practices" (*ibid.*), homosexuals continue to hide their sexual orientation because they feel oppressed by the [UN English version] "social and religious taboos" (UN 21 Jan. 2005). They are also wary of society's hostility toward them (*ibid.* 28 Nov. 2005). [UN English version] "Mamadou, a quiet dresser who wears his hair in long plaits in a sole slight sign of non-conformity, spent three weeks in bed on one occasion recovering from a beating after the gutter press published his photo and address" (*ibid.* 21 Jan. 2005); "Serigne . . . has been attacked twice. The first time, men assaulted him in the street after a newspaper named him as a gay AIDS activist" (AP 31 Mar. 2005). According to an article published by the Promotion of Diversity in France Action Circle (Cercle d'action pour la promotion de la diversité en France, CAPDIV), [translation] "the Senegalese national correspondent for International Day Against Homophobia was subjected to a particularly homophobic press campaign, was beaten and had to flee the city where he lived" (19 Jan. 2006).

Owing to social pressure, homosexuals in Senegal report living a [translation] "double life . . . a married man's life, hiding their sexual orientation for fear of being rejected by their family, friends and colleagues" (UN 28 Nov. 2005). According to a doctor of a regional committee involved in the fight against AIDS, homosexuals, [translation] "who often have multiple partners," are among "the most exposed to the HIV/AIDS virus . . . because of their lack of knowledge about methods to avoid the virus" (*ibid.*).

[Translation]

Following a 2005 study of 463 homosexual men, the Ministry of Health estimated the rate of HIV in that population at 21.5 per cent, while the national average was 1.5 per cent (*ibid.*).

However, homosexuals are so afraid of coming out that experts worry that the rate of infection may be higher than reported (AP 31 Mar. 2005).

[Translation]

The discrimination and stigmatization that they are subjected to have a considerable negative impact on their health. "Most MSMs (Men who have Sex with Men) who are kicked out of their home because of their sexual orientation spend the night in bars and hotels, which further exposes them to HIV" (UN 28 Nov. 2005).

Under Senegalese law, homosexual relations are considered to be "unnatural" (*ibid.*). Therefore, many Senegalese homosexuals shy away from the treatment to which they are entitled for fear of being confronted by rejection and violence (AP 31 Mar. 2005). They do not [translation] "want to visit doctors for fear of being judged by them" (UN 28 Nov. 2005). According to one Senegalese homosexual, [translation] "reception in medical centres is cold and unwelcoming. When homosexuals arrive, health workers make rude comments about their demeanour or clothing, the health workers' words conveying all the hatred they feel for homosexuals" (*ibid.*). Another homosexual man said that [translation] "doctors make appointments that they do not show up for. Sometimes doctors minimize an infection to avoid having to touch the patient" (*ibid.*). In addition, some homosexuals think

that prevention programs are mostly developed for heterosexuals (ibid.).

According to an Associated Press article posted on the Behind the Mask Website, many Senegalese doctors refuse to treat homosexuals for religious and legal reasons (AP 31 Mar. 2005). One doctor said that [translation] "it is a sin to touch an MSM because prayers would be worthless for 40 days" (UN 28 Nov. 2005). One medical source said that finding doctors to work with the gay community is difficult: [UN English version] "[s]ome people are just plain scared of being associated with [homosexuals] publicly and of having to face a backlash" (ibid. 21 Jan. 2005). However, [translation] "a handful of doctors is fighting to have the therapeutic control of this vulnerable group become one of the national priorities in the fight against HIV/AIDS" (ibid. 28 Nov. 2005). That same article indicated that two associations, And Liquey ("Work together" in Wolof - the most common local language in Senegal) and Bokk Xalaat ("We have the same idea"), whose members are from various regions of Senegal, lobby for access to health care, to HIV/AIDS treatments for Senegalese homosexuals (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sources, including: AIDS Education Global Information System (AEGIS), allAfrica.com, Alliance nationale contre le SIDA (ANCS), Amnesty International (AI), Conseil de l'Europe, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Inter Press Service News Agency, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), PANAPRESS, ReliefWeb, United States Department of State, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

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