



Frank Mugisha, PhD

Dr. Frank Mugisha is a Ugandan LGBTI human rights advocate and Executive Director of SMUG & SMUG International. A recipient of the Civil Rights Defender of the Year 2022, African Feather Award, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award and Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize, Dr. Mugisha has been recognized internationally for his activism and courage. He was a 2014 nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize and named one Time Magazine's The 100 Most Influential People of 2024.

HONORS & AWARDS

- 2024 Time Magazine's The 100 Most Influential People in 2024
- 2023 Stonewall Inn Brick Award as Global Activist
- 2022 Civil Rights Defender of the Year 2022, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2021 Human Rights Representative for Africa, Commonwealth Equality Network
- 2020 African Feather Award, South Africa
- 2017 World's Greatest Leaders List – Fortune
- 2015 Honorary Doctorate – University of Glasgow
- 2014 Nominee – Nobel Peace Prize
- 2013 PhD & Hon DUniv from, Ghent University
- 2013 International Human Rights Film Award, Cinema for Peace
- 2011 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award

- 2011 Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize
- 2010 United Nations Human Rights Defender

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2023 – present Fellow, Columbia University, SIPA-Institute of Global Politics
 - 2017 - present Executive Director, SMUG International
 - 2017 - present Senior Advisor, Uganda, Goldin Institute
 - 2016 - 2021 Steering Committee Member, The Commonwealth Equality Network
 - 2021 – present Regional Representative for Africa, Commonwealth Equality Network
 - 2009 – present Steering Committee Member, Uganda Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights & Constitutional Law
 - 2007 – present Executive Director, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG)
 - 2004 – present Founder, Icebreakers Uganda
- ### EDUCATION:
- 2005 – Bachelor Degree in Information Technology
 - 2013 - University of Ghent, graduated with a PhD in Political Science

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BIOGRAPHY

Ugandan gay rights activist Dr. Frank Mugisha was born in a suburb of Kampala. Raised in a strict Catholic family, he came out to his brother at age 14. Although his coming out estranged him from some family members, other friends and family have continued to support him. To come out in Uganda is to subject your life to great risk. In a 2011 NYT op-ed story, Mugisha said "From the time I was old enough to have romantic feelings, I knew I was gay, but we weren't supposed to speak of such things." In Uganda, you not only risk the possibility of bullying and beatings, but you also risk imprisonment, and put your life at risk as well.

During his undergraduate studies at Kyambogo University, Frank founded Icebreakers Uganda in 2004, an organization created as a support network for LGBT who are out or in the process of coming out to family and friends. Icebreakers Uganda offers counseling and suicide-prevention services to those who are brave enough to be openly gay in a place where both law and public opinion deem such an identity to be criminal. Since then, he has scaled his efforts by launching Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an umbrella organization that consists of four groups, including the first and only LGBT health center in Uganda. Frank serves as SMUG's Executive Director.

In addition to promoting equality for the LGBT community in Uganda, Mugisha and his team at SMUG have been fighting legal and ideological battles with Ugandan Parliament and Springfield, MA resident Scott Lively for years. He has done so by leading the petition of the 2009 Anti-Homosexuality Bill. He has also championed legal efforts against Scott Lively in U.S. District Court to curb discriminatory, anti-gay rhetoric from pervading Ugandan society. Dr. Mugisha has led the grassroots movement to save thousands of LBGTI Ugandans, like himself, from persecution, incarceration, and death - just for being who they are.

And Frank knows what is at stake. He along with members of his executive team at SMUG have been brutally arrested, tortured and after public outing in media, lives with constant threats to his life. For his courageous work, Mugisha has been honored by dozens of institutions including but not limited to: Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People 2024, Human Rights Defenders, the United Nations, Black Entertainment Television - BET, Rafto Foundation, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, and Amnesty International. He speaks to audiences of all ages and importance frequently sharing his story and inspiring others to fight for basic freedoms.

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TESTIMONIALS

Frank Mugisha exemplifies Robert Kennedy's vision of moral courage...There is a Ugandan proverb that says: 'Old men sit in the shade because they planted a tree many years before.' Because of his courage and with the support of his companions, Frank Mugisha will enjoy the shade of the tree he has planted, as will the thousands of Ugandans for whom he has advocated.

- Kerry Kennedy, President, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights

Frank Mugisha and his colleagues in SMUG have, through their strong personal engagement and at great personal risk, fronted the fight for LGBTI people's rights in Uganda.

- Rafto Foundation Press Release, 2011

I have said before it is critical for all Ugandans - the government and citizens alike-to speak out against discrimination, harassment, and intimidation of anyone. That is true no matter where they come from, what they believe or who they love...No one has been a stronger champion than [you]. You have been organized, disciplined, and savvy. You have marshaled the evidence and made the arguments using the rights enshrined in Uganda's constitution and in international law. And by doing so, you are a model for others and an inspiration to the world.

- Hillary Clinton, former U.S. Secretary of State presenting 2011 Human Rights Defenders Award to Frank Mugisha

With extraordinary eloquence, Mr. Mugisha has appealed to the United Nations for help. He has asked us to rally support for the decriminalization of homosexuality everywhere in the world. And that is what we will do. We have been called upon, and we will answer.

- Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary General of the United Nations, December 2010 Intl Human Rights Day

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VIDEOCLIP

- Democracy Now: [Full Interview: Frank Mugisha on New Anti-LGBTQ Bill in Uganda That Could Impose Death Penalty | Democracy Now!](#)
- Rachel Madoff: [Bing Videos](#)
- **Human Rights Defender** [Civil Rights Defender of the Year 2022 - Xheni Karaj and Frank Mugisha - Civil Rights Defenders \(crd.org\)](#)
- **Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Award:** [Five Questions with Frank Mugisha - Bing video](#)
- **GLAAD Interview:** [\(108\) Ugandan LGBT advocate Frank Mugisha says allies change public perception - YouTube](#)
- **Center for Constitutional Rights interview:** [Dr. Frank Mugisha of Sexual Minorities Uganda - Bing video](#)

CONTACT

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