CINEDIGM PRESENTS

CALL ME KUCHU

DIRECTED BY KATHERINE FAIRFAX WRIGHT AND MALIKA ZOUHALI-WORRALL

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SUMMARY

In Uganda, a new bill threatens to make homosexuality punishable by death. David Kato – Uganda’s first openly gay man – along with retired Anglican Bishop Christopher Senyonjo and his fellow activists work against the clock to defeat the legislation while combatting vicious persecution in their daily lives. But no one, not even the filmmakers can be prepared for the brutal murder that shakes the movement to its core and sends shock waves around the world.

SYNOPSIS

In an unmarked office at the end of a dirt track, veteran activist David Kato labors to repeal Uganda’s homophobic laws and liberate his fellow lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender men and women, or “kuchus.” But David’s formidable task just became much more difficult. A new “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” proposes death for HIV-positive gay men, and prison for anyone who fails to turn in a known homosexual. Inspired by American evangelicals who have christened Uganda ground zero in their war on the “homosexual agenda,” the bill awaits debate in Uganda’s Parliament.

While most religious leaders in Uganda support the Bill, one lone voice from the Church is willing to speak out against it: Bishop Christopher Senyonjo, a purple-robed sage who has been expelled from the Anglican Church of Uganda for his theological defense of Uganda’s LGBT community. Armed with a PhD in human sexuality and a thorough understanding of Biblical scripture, this octogenarian doggedly continues his work to establish a kuchu counseling center and safe house in Kampala.

Meanwhile, local newspapers have begun outing kuchus with vicious fervor under headlines such as: “HOMO TERROR! We Name and Shame Top Gays in the City.”

David, Uganda’s first openly gay man, is one of the few who dare to publicly protest state-sanctioned homophobia. Working with an idiosyncratic clan of fellow activists, David fights Uganda’s government and tabloids in the courts, on television, and at the United Nations. Because, he insists, “if we keep on hiding, they will say we’re not here.”

But one year into filming CALL ME KUCHU and just three weeks after a landmark legal victory, the unthinkable happens: David is brutally murdered in his home. His death sends shock waves around the world, and leaves the Bishop and Kampala’s kuchus traumatized and seeking answers for a way forward. With unprecedented access, CALL ME KUCHU depicts the last year in the life of a courageous, quick-witted and steadfast man whose wisdom and achievements were not fully recognized until after his death, and whose memory has inspired a new generation of human rights advocates.
DIRECTORS’ STATEMENT

During our first days in Kampala, Member of Parliament David Bahati told us: “There is no longer a debate in Uganda as to whether homosexuality is right or not – it is not.” We were tempted to believe him. State-sanctioned homophobia was gaining momentum across the African continent, with a recent volley of attempts to pass homophobic laws and arrest LGBT people in countries from Senegal to Burundi.

But during that first week in Uganda we also met David Kato. Initially, he played something of a fixer, our main liaison with the LGBT, or “kuchu” community. We soon realized, however, that the man known as the “grandfather of the kuchus” was one of the most outspoken and inspired activists in East Africa. The more time we spent documenting his work, the more evident it became that, contrary to the M.P.’s claim, David and his fellow activists were, in fact, generating a public debate in Uganda that was shaking the foundations of the country’s discriminatory status quo and drawing international attention. Uganda, it seemed, had become a frontier in the global battle for LGBT rights.

Our goal with this documentary – our first feature film – was to ensure it took the viewer beyond the chronicle of victimization so often depicted in the international news media: to tell the nuanced story of David and Kampala’s kuchus as they work to change their fate. First and foremost, we wanted it to be an intimate, character-driven film, as much because we felt that would be a more powerful advocacy tool as because of our stylistic preferences.

Over the course of two years, we documented the daily lives and courageous work of David and his fellow kuchus. We were there when David appeared on television to call for an end to LGBT persecution, we were there when David won his case against gay-bashing tabloid Rolling Stone, and we were there during David’s rare moments of respite, when he’d kick back, open a beer and tend to his small farm.

So David’s brutal murder in January 2011 came as a terrible shock to us both. Nonetheless, we proceeded to film because we believed that we had a responsibility to David, as well as to his community, family and friends, to document the impact of his death and the legacy of his life.

In telling this crucial story, we explore the paradox of democracy in a country where a judiciary recognizes the civil rights of individual kuchus, yet the popular vote and daily violence threaten to eradicate those rights altogether. We also examine the nature and consequences of profound religious faith, as expressed both by American and Ugandan evangelical leaders, and by the LGBT community and its allies.

Since its world premiere, CALL ME KUCHU has played at more than 100 festivals, and received theatrical distribution in Germany and the UK, as well as the US. We are currently laying the foundation for an outreach and advocacy strategy with the aim of incorporating the film into LGBT rights campaigns around the world.

David Kato shared our strong belief in the power of film to document, educate, and, perhaps most importantly, humanize Kampala’s kuchu movement. It is with David in mind that we are determined to bring CALL ME KUCHU to the most crucial audiences and to ensure it can have the broadest impact possible. A story told in his words, David Kato’s final testimony lives on in this film, while his work is carried on by those he left behind.
FILM SUBJECTS

DAVID
In public, David is passionate, relentless, fiercely intelligent. In private, at home on his small farm, a charismatic yet vulnerable individual emerges: a man with a sharp sense of humor and a deep-seated fear of sleeping alone at night. In those rare moments away from the daily toil of his activism, David daydreams about one day building a gay village on his land, where Kampala’s kuchus can live and work in solidarity.

NAOME
A warm-hearted and motherly activist who has experienced more than her fair share of persecution, Naome is David’s closest friend and an equally gutsy advocate in Uganda’s fledgling LGBT rights movement.

BISHOP SENYONJO
Bishop Senyojo has been expelled from the Anglican Church of Uganda for his theological defense of Uganda’s LGBT community. Nonetheless, armed with a PhD in human sexuality and a thorough understanding of Biblical scripture, this purple-robed sage doggedly continues his work to establish a kuchu counseling center and safe house.

STOSH
After enduring a “corrective” rape at a young age, Stosh spent years living lonely, confused, and suicidal. But the female-to-male transman found solace in Kampala’s tight-knit LGBT community.

LONGJONES
An LGBT counselor, Longjones has always shied away from the limelight of his sexual orientation. But in the wake of David’s death, Longjones feels compelled to sustain the veteran activist’s crusade for human rights, and steps forward to become one of the public faces of kuchu activism in Uganda.
THE TEAM

KATHERINE FAIRFAX WRIGHT (DIRECTOR, DP, EDITOR)
Katherine Fairfax Wright graduated from Columbia University with a double major in Film Studies and Anthropology. She produced GABI ON THE ROOF IN JULY (2010), associate-produced the award-winning documentary LUMO, and has worked in a producing role on several other films. She is also an award-winning photographer. Katherine is a Chaz & Roger Ebert Directing Fellow, as well as an alumnus of the Film Independent Documentary Lab, the Garrett Scott Documentary Development Grant at Full Frame, and the Film Independent Producing Lab. In 2012, Filmmaker Magazine named Katherine one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film. She is currently producing Malik Vitthal’s Watts-set gangster drama IMPERIAL DREAMS.

MALIKA ZOUHALI-WORRALL (DIRECTOR, PRODUCER)
Malika Zouhali-Worrall is a British-Moroccan filmmaker and journalist based in New York. Her work has been published in The Financial Times and at CNN.com, for which she has reported from India, Uganda, China and the U.S. Malika is a graduate of Cambridge University and holds an MA in International Affairs from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po), where she studied under an Entente Cordiale full scholarship. She is a Chaz & Roger Ebert Directing Fellow, and an alumnus of the Film Independent Documentary Lab and the Garrett Scott Documentary Development Grant at Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. In 2012, Filmmaker Magazine named Malika one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film. Next up, Malika will be producing LONG YEAR BEGIN, a documentary by David Osit about the Global Seed Vault and humanity's perpetual quest for self-preservation.

JON MANDABACH (COMPOSER)
Jon Mandabach lives in Los Angeles, where he passionately creates music for film, commercials and sound art installations. As well as composing, performing and recording the entire soundtrack for CALL ME KUCHU almost singlehandedly, Jon recently finished a new art piece, “Escapes,” which was exhibited at the Suzanne Geiss Company Gallery in New York earlier this year, and he is currently finishing the score for a web series to be released by the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (MOCA) in September 2012. In his commercial work, Jon has worked with QDepartment and Apple’s Media Arts Lab, and he is a playlist curator for The Playlist Generation. Jon is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, where he concentrated in Philosophy and Sound Installation. He has great dreams for sound and its personal and cultural resonance.
TIMELINE OF EVENTS

December 22, 2008 - The High Court of Uganda rules in favor of LGBT activist Victor Mukasa and a co-plaintiff in their suit against Uganda’s Attorney General. The judge rules that a police raid on Mukasa’s home violated his right to privacy.

March 2009 - Three American evangelicals, including Scott lively, lead a workshop in Uganda that details the “evil institution” of the “gay movement.” The event is attended by Ugandan politicians.

October 14, 2009 - The anti-homosexuality Bill is introduced in Uganda’s Parliament by Member of Parliament David Bahati. The legislation proposes the death penalty for HIV-positive gay men and prison for anyone who fails to turn in a homosexual.

May 2, 2010 - American evangelical Lou Engle holds a prayer rally in Kampala during which he praises the Ugandan government for its righteousness in fighting the homosexual agenda.

October 2, 2010 - Photographs of David, Bishop Senyonjo and Naome appear in Ugandan tabloid Rolling Stone as part of a front-page story that lists Uganda’s 100 “Top Homos” under the headline “Hang Them.”

November 2, 2010 - After David and two other plaintiffs file a lawsuit against Rolling Stone, Uganda’s High Court issues a temporary injunction ordering the newspaper to stop identifying people it claims are homosexual.

November 18, 2010 - David and Longjones meet with other human rights activists at the UN office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR) to compile a document on LGBT persecution for the upcoming human rights review of Uganda at the United Nations.

January 3, 2011 - Uganda’s High Court rules that Rolling Stone threatened the “fundamental rights and freedoms” of David and others, and violated their constitutional right to privacy. Rolling Stone is ordered to pay David and the other plaintiffs 1.5 million Ugandan shillings ($600) each.

January 26, 2011 - For reasons that remain unknown, David is attacked at his home and bludgeoned with a hammer. He dies on the way to the hospital. David’s murder is condemned by US President Barack Obama, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the European Union and the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

May 2011 - The Ugandan Parliamentary session closes without a vote on the Anti-Homosexuality Bill.

August 10, 2011 - Uganda’s LGBT activist community launches the “Hate No More” campaign to combat state-sanctioned homophobia in the country.

October 2011 - Uganda’s Parliament votes to reopen debate on the Anti-Homosexuality Bill.

October 2011 - During the United Nations Human Rights Council’s review of Uganda in Geneva, the document of human rights violations compiled by David, Longjones and other kuchus months earlier informs the recommendations of numerous countries that call on Uganda to end LGBT persecution.
November 10, 2011 - Sidney Nsubuga Enoch is found guilty of David’s murder, and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

January 29, 2012 - In a ceremony in London, Jamaican LGBT activist Maurice Tomlinson receives the David Kato Vision & Voice award, sponsored by sexuality and gender rights organizations including the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and Sexual Minorities Uganda, of which David was a founding member.

March 14, 2012 - Ugandan LGBT rights group Sexual Minorities Uganda and the US-based Center for Constitutional Rights file a lawsuit in a US federal court against American evangelical Scott Lively. The suit alleges that Lively’s involvement in anti-gay efforts in Uganda constitute persecution.
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