

OPEN PETITION

To the President and Board of Trustees

Lincoln University, Pennsylvania

Regarding the Proposed Honorary Doctorate for President John Dramani Mahama

Date: 20th March, 2026

To: Dr. Brenda A. Allen, President, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania

Re: Withdrawal of the Honorary Doctorate Proposed for His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana

We write to you with deep respect for Lincoln University and everything it represents. This institution produced Kwame Nkrumah. It shaped men and women who went on to lead nations, fight injustice, and defend the dignity of people of African descent all over the world. It is precisely because of that legacy that we are writing to you today.

We are asking Lincoln University to reconsider its decision to confer an honorary doctorate on His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, scheduled for 26th March 2026.

We are not writing against Ghana. We are not writing against the reparations cause. We are writing because President Mahama's government is actively **leading the parliamentary effort to enact a law that criminalises LGBTQ+ people, their families, and anyone who speaks or advocates on their behalf**. That law, the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill 2025, is before Ghana's Parliament right now. And the same political party that is sponsoring it is the party President Mahama leads.

An institution that was founded to liberate African people from oppression cannot simultaneously honour a head of state who is overseeing the legal persecution of a vulnerable group of those same people. Those two things cannot sit together.

1. What the Bill Actually Does

The Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill 2025 was gazetted on 10th September 2025 and presented to Parliament on 17th February 2026. It is currently before the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs. The bill goes far beyond any conventional social legislation. It is a comprehensive system of surveillance, criminalisation, and punishment.^[1]

Criminalising Who You Are

Section 3(1)(e) of the Bill makes it a criminal offence for any person to **"hold out as"** a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, pansexual, non-binary, or any sexual identity

outside of male and female categories. A person does not need to do anything. They simply need to exist as who they are. The penalty under Section 3(2) is a fine of up to 5,000 penalty units or imprisonment of up to three years, or both.^[1]

This is extraordinary. Criminal law in any functioning democracy targets acts that harm other people. This bill targets identity itself. A person can wake up, go about their day without committing any act against anyone, and still be arrested and imprisoned simply because of who they are.

Criminalising Advocacy and Speech

Section 9 of the Bill criminalises producing, broadcasting, publishing, or distributing any material through any platform, including television, radio, newspapers, social media, websites, and electronic devices, if that material promotes an act prohibited under the Bill. It also makes it a crime to **"engage in, participate in, promote or support an act aimed at changing public opinion"** towards any prohibited act. The penalty is between five and ten years in prison.^[1]

That means a journalist who writes a balanced news report can be prosecuted. A lawyer who publishes a legal opinion saying the bill is unconstitutional can be prosecuted. A university lecturer who teaches human rights law can be prosecuted. A doctor who explains gender identity to a patient can be prosecuted.

Section 10 does the same thing but specifically for content directed at children or young people, with penalties of between six and ten years in prison.^[1]

Criminalising Your Own Family

Section 16(1) of the Bill requires every single person in Ghana who becomes aware that someone has committed an offence under the Bill to report that person to the police, or to a community authority who must then report to police within three days. Traditional rulers, Members of Parliament, and religious leaders are listed as designated reporting authorities.^[1]

This means that if a mother finds out her son is gay, she is legally required to report him to the police. If a father discovers his daughter is transgender, he faces legal consequences for protecting her. If a teacher notices a student might be LGBTQ+ and says nothing, that teacher commits an offence. The Bill turns every family, every school, every community into an instrument of state surveillance.

Section 16(1): "A person who has knowledge that an offence is committed under this Act shall report the commission of the offence to a police officer or in the absence of a police officer to a relevant authority of the community in which the offence is committed."

Banning Every Organisation That Helps LGBTQ+ People

Section 12 immediately disbands all LGBTQ+ organisations that existed before the Bill comes into force. Section 13 makes it a criminal offence to form, join, operate, or even participate in any

group whose purpose is wholly or partly, overtly or covertly, to support activities prohibited under the Bill. The penalty is between three and five years in prison.^[1]

This wipes out civil society. Health organisations providing HIV services to gay men, legal aid groups, safe housing providers, and counselling services all face immediate closure and criminal prosecution of their staff.

Making It Extraditable

Section 19 amends Ghana's Extradition Act to add all offences under the Bill as extraditable offences. A Ghanaian citizen who flees the country to escape prosecution can be pursued, arrested in another country, and returned to Ghana to face charges.^[1] This provision signals clearly that there is no safe exit. Ghana will pursue its own citizens across international borders for the crime of being who they are.

Bill Provisions at a Glance

- Section 3: Criminalises same-sex conduct AND identity itself. Up to 3 years in prison.
- Section 9: Criminalises all advocacy, media, and speech in support of LGBTQ+ people. Up to 10 years.
- Section 10: Same as Section 9 but targeting content directed at children. Up to 10 years.
- Section 12: Immediately disbands all existing LGBTQ+ organisations.
- Section 13: Criminalises forming or joining any group that supports LGBTQ+ people. Up to 5 years.
- Section 14 and 15: Bans LGBTQ+ people from ever adopting or fostering children.
- Section 16: Requires everyone to report LGBTQ+ people to police or face consequences.
- Section 19: Makes all offences extraditable so people cannot escape by leaving Ghana.

2. President Mahama's Direct Role and His Own Words

We want to be accurate. We are not relying on inference or political opposition. We are relying on what President Mahama himself has said, in public, on the record.

In January 2025, President Mahama, as the incoming president, urged the reintroduction of the anti-LGBTQ bill as a government-sponsored initiative.^[2] This was not a passive position. He was asking his own government to take ownership of the legislation and drive it through Parliament.

In November 2025, President Mahama stated publicly that marriage is between a man and a woman.^[3]

Also in November 2025, he said explicitly: **"I'll assent to anti-LGBTQ bill if Parliament passes it."**^[4]

In February 2026, his own party communications representative Professor Benedicta Fosu-Mensah confirmed: **"His Excellency John Dramani Mahama's position has not changed. He just wants Parliament to go through the process and he will assent to the bill."**^[5]

And as recently as February 2026, a report from Citi Newsroom carried the headline: **"Mahama's pen dripping to assent anti-LGBTQ bill."**^[6]

These are not campaign statements from years ago. These are positions this man has held and repeated since becoming president in January 2025. The bill is before Parliament right now. He has committed, repeatedly and publicly, to signing it into law.

"I'll assent to anti-LGBTQ bill if Parliament passes it." — President John Dramani Mahama, November 2025 [4]

"His Excellency John Dramani Mahama's position has not changed. He just wants Parliament to go through the process and he will assent to the bill." — Professor Benedicta Fosu-Mensah, NDC Communications Team, February 2026 [5]

3. The Chief Proponent Now Controls Ghana's Communications Infrastructure

The Bill was introduced in Parliament by Honourable Samuel Nartey George, the Member of Parliament for Ningo Prampram. Sam George has been one of the most vocal and aggressive champions of this legislation since 2021. In that year, he publicly threatened to physically assault the Australian High Commissioner for supporting LGBTQ+ rights in Ghana.^[7]

"I'll beat LGBTQ+ advocate Australian High Commissioner in this town." — Samuel Nartey George, MP, May 2021 [7]

President Mahama has since appointed Samuel Nartey George as Minister for Communication, Digital Technology, and Innovation. In this role, Sam George now supervises Ghana's entire communications infrastructure, including the National Communications Authority, the Cybersecurity Authority, the Ghana Post Company, and broadcast regulation. The man who wrote

a bill to imprison people for social media posts about LGBTQ+ rights now controls the apparatus that regulates what Ghanaians can say online.

Furthermore, Sam George has publicly championed the passage of a Criminal Libel or Information Bill that legal experts and civil society organisations warn is designed to criminalise criticism of the government and shut down political opposition and civic voices. He has made clear that organisations and individuals who push back against government policy, including on LGBTQ+ issues, will face legal consequences under a tightened communications and information framework.^[7]

This is not a coincidence of appointments. It is a pattern. The man who wants to imprison people for advocacy has been handed control of the systems through which Ghanaians communicate, report, and organise. That should alarm anyone who values freedom of expression, regardless of where they stand on any other issue.

4. Reparations and Repression Cannot Walk Together

We want to be honest about something that may feel uncomfortable. President Mahama is in New York this week presenting a UN resolution on reparations for the transatlantic slave trade. He is about to be honoured at the university where Kwame Nkrumah studied. And he is doing this while his government is actively leading an effort to criminalise a group of people for who they are.

The transatlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity precisely because it said that some categories of human beings, by virtue of what they were born as, had no rights, no dignity, and no protection from the state. The same logic now runs through every clause of the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill 2025.

Section 3 says: if you were born this way, you are a criminal. Section 9 says: if you speak for people like this, you go to prison. Section 16 says: if you know someone like this and do not report them, you are also guilty. Section 19 says: you cannot even flee.

You cannot stand at the United Nations and demand that the world acknowledge the moral catastrophe of treating human beings as less than human, and then return home to sign a law that does exactly the same thing to a different group of people. The moral foundation of the reparations argument is the universality of human dignity. That argument collapses the moment you apply it selectively.

"The trafficking in enslaved Africans and racialized chattel enslavement were foundational crimes that have shaped the modern world. And their consequences continue to manifest in structural inequality, racial discrimination, and economic disparity. Recognition is not about division. It is about moral courage." — President John Dramani Mahama, AU Summit Address, February 2026

We agree with every word of that. We simply ask: where is that moral courage when it comes to the people in Ghana who are being criminalised for their identity today?

5. The Bill Violates International Frameworks Lincoln University Upholds

Lincoln University's motto is Learn. Liberate. Lead. The institution was founded on the principle that education and liberation are inseparable. The Bill that President Mahama has committed to sign violates the very international standards that underpin that mission.

- **ICCPR Article 17** protects the right to privacy. The UN Human Rights Committee confirmed in *Toonen v. Australia* (1994) that criminalising same-sex conduct between consenting adults is a direct violation of this right. Section 3 of the Bill does exactly this.^[8]
- **ICCPR Article 19** protects freedom of expression. Section 9 of the Bill criminalises all advocacy, speech, and media content on LGBTQ+ issues with up to 10 years in prison. This cannot be reconciled with Article 19 under any proportionality test.
- **ICCPR Articles 21 and 22** protect freedom of assembly and association. Sections 12 and 13 of the Bill disband all existing LGBTQ+ organisations and criminalise forming any new ones.
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3** requires that the best interests of the child be the primary consideration. Sections 14 and 15 impose a blanket ban on LGBTQ+ people adopting or fostering children, with no individual assessment at all. This is not how child welfare law works anywhere in the world.
- **Convention Against Torture, Article 16** prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The UN Committee Against Torture has found that hostile legal frameworks that expose LGBTQ+ people to systematic violence and persecution engage this obligation.
- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Articles 2, 5, 9, 10, and 11** protect non-discrimination, dignity, expression, association, and assembly. Ghana's own regional human rights body, the African Commission, adopted Resolution 275 in 2014 calling on states specifically to end violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.^[9]
- **SDG 10, Target 10.3** requires states to eliminate discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. The Bill creates new discriminatory laws, which is precisely what SDG 10 says Ghana should be doing the opposite of.

6. Our Request to Lincoln University

Lincoln University does not need to take a position on Ghana's internal politics. You do not need to weigh in on culture or religion. What we are asking is simpler than that.

We are asking Lincoln University to apply the same standards to this honour that Lincoln applies to everything else it does. Ask whether the person being honoured is, right now, actively overseeing efforts that criminalise people for who they are, silence those who speak for them, require families to report their own children to the state, and allow the government to pursue people across international borders.

The answer, based entirely on President Mahama's own words and the parliamentary record of his party, is yes.

We are therefore respectfully requesting that Lincoln University **withdraw or suspend the honorary doctorate** until President Mahama either publicly commits to vetoing the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill 2025 if it passes Parliament, or Parliament definitively rejects the Bill.

We attach a copy of the full Bill for your review. We are also available to provide any additional documentation, briefings, or evidence the university requires.

Kwame Nkrumah's legacy at Lincoln was the liberation of people from oppression, not the construction of new systems of oppression. We ask Lincoln to honour that legacy in how it chooses to bestow honours.

Respectfully submitted,

JustRight Ghana

20th March, 2026

Find attached: Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, 2025, as gazetted on 10th September 2025 and presented to Parliament of Ghana on 17th February 2026.

References and Footnotes

- [1] Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, 2025. Republic of Ghana. Gazetted 10th September 2025. Presented to Parliament 17th February 2026. Sections 3, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 19.
- [2] GBC Ghana Online (January 14, 2025). "President Mahama urges reintroduction of LGBTQ bill as government-sponsored initiative." <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/news/politics/mahama-lgbtq/2025/>
- [3] Citi Newsroom (November 11, 2025). "Marriage is between man and woman — Mahama." <https://citinewsroom.com/2025/11/marriage-is-between-man-and-woman-mahama/>
- [4] MyJoyOnline (November 18, 2025). "I'll assent to anti-LGBTQ bill if Parliament passes it — Mahama." <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ill-assent-to-anti-lgbtq-bill-if-parliament-passes-it-mahama/>
- [5] GhanaWeb (February 13, 2026). "President Mahama's position on LGBTQ+ has not changed — Professor Fosu-Mensah." <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/President-Mahama-s-position-on-LGBTQ-has-not-changed-Professor-Fosu-Mensah-2021512>
- [6] Citi Newsroom (February 4, 2026). "Mahama's pen dripping to assent anti-LGBTQ bill — Dafeamekpor." <https://citinewsroom.com/2026/02/mahamas-pen-dripping-to-assent-anti-lgbtq-bill-dafeamekpor/>
- [7] YEN.com.gh (May 14, 2021). "Video: I'll beat LGBTQ+ advocate Australian High Commissioner in this town — Sam George threatens." <https://yen.com.gh/186850-video-ill-beat-lgbtq-advocate-australian-high-commissioner-town-sam-george-threatens.html>
- [8] UN Human Rights Committee (1994). *Toonen v. Australia*. Communication No. 488/1992. UN Doc. CCPR/C/50/D/488/1992. Finding that laws criminalising same-sex conduct violate ICCPR Article 17.
- [9] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2014). Resolution 275: Protection Against Violence and Other Human Rights Violations Against Persons on the Basis of Their Real or Imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity.
- [10] UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2024). "Ghana: Turk alarmed as Parliament passes deeply harmful anti-gay bill." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/ghana-turk-alarmed-parliament-passes-deeply-harmful-anti-gay-bill>
- [11] Human Rights Watch (March 10, 2026). "Ghana's Parliament Revives Dangerous Anti-LGBT Bill." <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/10/ghanas-parliament-revives-dangerous-anti-lgbt-bill>
- [12] Context News / Thomson Reuters Foundation (November 27, 2024). "Ghana parties stoke anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment ahead of election." <https://context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/ghana-parties-stoke-anti-lgbtq-sentiment-ahead-of-election>
- [13] THEM (November 21, 2025). "Ghana's President Pledged to Sign Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill That Penalizes Allies, Too." <https://www.them.us/story/ghana-president-sign-anti-lgbtq-bill-allies-family-values-bill>
- [14] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966). Articles 17, 19, 21, 22, and 26. United Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 999, p. 171.
- [15] Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Articles 2, 3, 13, 17, 24, and 28. United Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 1577, p. 3.
- [16] Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984). Articles 1 and 16.
- [17] African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter) (1981). Articles 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, and 11. OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5.