



June 2026

NEWSLETTER

Rainbow Haven: A Safe Harbor Amid Senegal's LGBTQ+ Crackdown



With its free elections and smooth transitions of government, Senegal is often held up as a beacon of democratic stability in Western Africa.

In spite of that positive image, in March, Senegal's Parliament overwhelmingly passed a new set of anti-LGBTQ+ amendments that are among Africa's most draconian.

The new amendments to a colonial-era law dramatically increase penalties for same-sex relations, and, for the first time, criminalize trans people and LGBTQ+ community activism.

The amendments to Article 319 of Senegal's Penal Code increase the maximum prison sentence for same-sex intimate relations from five to ten years and increase the maximum fine fivefold to 10 million CFA francs, about \$25,000 Canadian

The amendments also add disturbing new offences to the code.

One of them criminalizes "transsexualism," meaning Senegal joins a short list of countries with similar anti-trans laws that includes Saudi Arabia and Brunei.

Another new amendment makes it a crime to "seem to promote" homosexuality, bisexuality, and transsexualism, punishable by a maximum seven-year prison term.

Rainbow Haven helps a number of LGBTQ+ asylum-seekers in Senegal while they await sanctuary in safe countries. The asylum-seekers have taken extra

precautions to protect their safety in light of the new laws.

A recent legal analysis by the New York-based human rights organization, Outright International, warns that Senegal's crackdown will have dire consequences, especially for people living with HIV.

In a statement provided to Rainbow Haven, Neela Ghoshal, Outright International's Senior Director of Law, Policy and Research, said, "In this new reality, an HIV patient can be cut off from health services, a parent of an LGBTQ+ person who speaks out on their child's behalf can be prosecuted, and even one's hairstyle can lead to arrest."

According to Outright's analysis, Senegal's new amendments punishing the "promotion" or "financing" of LGBTQ+ people are part of a growing trend, with almost identical language used for new laws in Uganda, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

"This development is part of a dangerous global wave of legislation criminalizing 'promotion' of diverse sexual and gender identities that aims to erode the legal, civic, and healthcare infrastructure that enables LGBTQ+ people worldwide to exist publicly and safely," said Outright's Neela Ghoshal.

One American anti-LGBTQ+ rights organization claims victory for some of that global wave of legislation.

A recent Reuters news service article quotes the leader of a Massachusetts group called MassResistance explaining how his group advised a like-minded group in Senegal on how to pressure the government to enact the anti-LGBTQ+ amendments.

He explained that under the Trump administration's hands-off approach to human rights, his group now has free rein to push for anti-LGBTQ+ rights legislation all over the world. This underscores the importance of Rainbow Haven and organizations like it, which continue to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in countries that are becoming increasingly hostile toward LGBTQ+ individuals.

See You at Pride This Summer!

This summer, Rainbow Haven is excited to once again take part in Pride celebrations across Canada.

Thank you Donors

To our incredible supporters, thank you for standing with Rainbow Haven and the LGBTQ+ asylum-seekers we serve. Your generosity continues to provide safety, shelter,



For the third year in a row, Rainbow Haven will host an outreach booth at the 2026 Victoria Pride Festival on July 12 at MacDonald Park. Festivities begin immediately after the parade.

Volunteers will be on hand throughout the day to meet community members, answer questions, and talk about our work supporting LGBTQ+ refugees in Africa.

Festival-goers can also stop by for Rainbow Haven pins and free access to our water refill station during the event.

Beyond Victoria, Rainbow Haven will also have a presence at Pride events in Montréal (Festival Fierté Montréal) July 31–August 9 and Ottawa (Capital Pride) August 22–30.

In Ottawa, we are pleased to be partnering with Citizens for Public Justice as we continue building

food, and hope to people fleeing persecution while they await refugee approval in safer countries. Because Rainbow Haven is entirely volunteer-run, every donation goes directly toward supporting those in urgent need during the earliest and most vulnerable stage of the asylum seekers' journey.

Over the past year, your support has helped Rainbow Haven continue expanding access to safe housing and emergency assistance for individuals facing violence, discrimination, and displacement. Monthly donors, in particular, have made a tremendous difference by giving us the stability to plan ahead, maintain safe houses, and respond more quickly when new emergencies arise. Even modest recurring contributions help us better budget for ongoing costs and extend support to more people seeking refuge and safety.

Whether you give monthly, annually, or whenever you are able, please know that your kindness has a real and lasting impact. We are deeply grateful for the compassion of our donor community and for those who continue to share Rainbow Haven's mission with friends, family, and colleagues. You can donate to Rainbow Haven, and eligible gifts over \$18 will receive an official charitable tax receipt from the Church of St. John the Divine. Thank you again for helping us

connections and raising awareness nationwide.

create safer futures for LGBTQ+ asylum-seekers around the world.

We hope to see you there!

Donate

A Wonderful Afternoon of Music and Support

On March 14, 2026, Rainbow Haven proudly hosted our first annual fundraiser concert at Christ Church Cathedral, featuring an incredible performance by the Chief and Petty Officers' Band.

Thanks to the generosity of everyone who attended and the outstanding support of our performers, the afternoon raised **\$2,100** in support of LGBTQ+ refugees living in our Kenya safe house while they await resettlement in a safer country.

The concert was filled with warmth, community spirit, and beautiful music, making it a truly memorable afternoon for all involved. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Chief and Petty Officers' Band for donating their time and talent to help make this event such a success.

We are also excited to share that the Chief and Petty Officers' Band has agreed to continue this partnership as an **annual fundraising concert** going forward. We look forward to welcoming everyone again next spring and will announce the date of the next concert in the coming months.



To everyone who attended, donated, volunteered, and supported this event – thank you for helping make our first annual fundraiser such a meaningful success.

Donate to Kenya

Art with a Purpose: Rainbow Haven at Gage Gallery

Rainbow Haven was honoured to be part of Tanya Bub's recent exhibition, *Wild Art for the Big of Heart*, at Gage Gallery in Victoria from May 12–31, 2026.

The show brought together Tanya's remarkable sculptural work and the work of local charities whose passion projects make a real difference in people's lives. Tanya began with Rainbow Haven as an inspiration and then added other charities serving the Victoria community and beyond.

For Rainbow Haven, the connection between art and mission was especially powerful. Tanya's work often captures movement, courage, vulnerability, and the human spirit pressing forward. Those themes speak directly to the people Rainbow Haven serves: LGBTQ+ refugees who are waiting in countries of transition, often at the most dangerous point in their journey to long-term safety.

Rainbow Haven inspired two sculptures in the show: *The Narrow Path Forward*, the figure featured on the exhibition poster, and *Big of Heart*, a masculine companion piece. Together, they evoke courage, motion, vulnerability, and the hope of reaching safety.



The Narrow Path Forward



Big of Heart

Rainbow Haven's role is simple but vital. We provide safe, dignified temporary housing and practical support while people wait for refugee status with the United Nations and find safe countries to sponsor them. We do not solve every problem in the refugee journey, but we help protect people while they are at serious risk and while they navigate the next step toward safety.

One of the people recently supported through the Rainbow Haven safe house in Dakar has now reached safety in Canada. The day after he arrived, he said, "I am so happy to be free." That sentence reminds us why safe housing matters, and why this work must continue.

The Gage Gallery show also offered a practical way to support Rainbow Haven. During the exhibition, 25% of the purchase price of Tanya Bub's artwork could be directed to the buyer's chosen participating charity. Visitors were able to enjoy the art, learn about the charities, and choose to support the cause that spoke to them.

We are deeply grateful to Tanya Bub and Gage Gallery for including Rainbow Haven in this generous and imaginative exhibition. Art has a way of making visible what can otherwise feel distant. In this case, it helped tell a story of danger, shelter, courage, and hope.

Thank you, Tanya, for joining us in this work.

A Story of Separation, Resilience, and Hope

For many LGBTQ+ refugees, the journey to safety is not simply a matter of crossing a border. It can mean years of uncertainty, family separation, financial hardship, and fear of persecution.

The story of Fatima and Aida offers a glimpse into the challenges faced by many LGBTQ+ women in West Africa.



Fatima was born and raised in The Gambia in a traditional Muslim family. Intelligent and ambitious, she completed her education and built a career as a hairdresser and aesthetician. She married, became a mother, and outwardly lived the life expected of her. Yet from a young age, she knew she was attracted to women.

Like many LGBTQ+ people in West Africa, Fatima faced a difficult reality. Same-sex relationships were criminalized, and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes were deeply rooted in many parts of society.

Despite these risks, she gradually found friendship and support within the clandestine LGBTQ+ community.

Through business connections she met Aida, a woman from neighbouring Senegal. The two women shared similar backgrounds and were raising

children of their own. Their friendship grew into a loving partnership that they kept secret for nearly a decade while navigating the risks associated with being LGBTQ+ in a region where their relationship was not only socially condemned but illegal.

Everything changed when a gathering attended by LGBTQ+ people in The Gambia was raided by police. Fatima was among those arrested. She later described being beaten and interrogated by authorities who demanded the names of other LGBTQ+ people, which she did not provide. Although she was eventually released, she knew she was no longer safe. Leaving her young child in the care of family, she fled across the border to Senegal, where Aida and her family sheltered her.

Unable to return home and separated from her children, Fatima sought protection through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). What followed was more than a year of interviews, document reviews, and waiting as officials assessed her refugee claim. Throughout the process she remained in daily contact with her children by phone while living in uncertainty about her future.

After 15 months, Fatima received the news she had been hoping for: Canada had accepted her for resettlement.

The opportunity brought both relief and heartbreak.

Although she had requested that her children accompany her, they could not travel immediately. Additional permissions and immigration procedures were required, meaning Fatima would have to leave for Canada alone. She also had to say goodbye to Aida, not knowing when they would see each other again.

Upon arriving in Canada, Fatima worked multiple jobs and sent money home to support her family. When it became clear that her children would be safer in Senegal, Aida and her relatives stepped in to care for them while Fatima continued the long process of family reunification. She later trained as a healthcare professional, improving her ability to support her family financially.

The years that followed were marked by both joy and disappointment. Two of her children were eventually reunited with her in Canada, while an administrative error delayed the immigration process for the third. After years of additional paperwork and waiting, Fatima finally travelled to Senegal to bring her third child to Canada. The trip also allowed her and Aida to see one another in person for the first time in four years.

Today, all three of Fatima's children are safely reunited with her in Canada. They are thriving in their new community and looking forward to becoming

Canadian citizens. Fatima continues to build a stable future for her family while working to bring Aida to Canada through family sponsorship.

Why This Story Matters

While Fatima and Aida were not supported by Rainbow Haven, their experience reflects many of the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ refugees across Africa.

For LGBTQ+ women, persecution often intersects with other barriers, including economic dependence, childcare responsibilities, family obligations, and limited access to safe housing. The refugee determination and resettlement process can take years, leaving people vulnerable while they wait for a durable solution.

This is where Rainbow Haven makes a difference.

Rainbow Haven supports LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in countries such as Senegal and Kenya by providing safe housing, food assistance, and other essential supports while individuals await refugee status determination and resettlement opportunities through UNHCR. These services help people remain safe, maintain their dignity, and focus on building a future during what can be a lengthy and uncertain process.

Fatima and Aida's story is a reminder that behind every refugee application is a human story—one of courage, sacrifice, perseverance, and hope. It is also a reminder of why support for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers remains so important: everyone deserves the chance to live openly, safely, and free from persecution.

Rainbow Haven

502-1375 Newport Ave, Victoria
Canada

You received this email because
you signed up on our website or
donated to us.

[Unsubscribe](#)

