

## Tributes after gay activist David Kato is murdered

10:07am Thursday 3rd February 2011

By Jennifer Bell

TRIBUTES have been paid to a gay activist beaten to death only months after bringing his battle for equality to York.

David Kato, a leading figure for Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), was murdered with a hammer weeks after securing a court victory against a newspaper which had called for him to be hanged. The brutal attack has left those in York who met him stunned.

Mr Kato, one of few openly gay men in Uganda, spent six months in York last year, during which time he completed a fellowship programme at the University of York's Centre for Human Rights.

He was also prominent within Uganda's only gay Christian organisation, Integrity, and had spoken just before his death of how he felt unsafe. Friends believe his sexuality may have been a murder motive, but this has yet to be confirmed.

Lena Barrett, the fellowship scheme manager at the Centre for Human Rights, said Mr Kato met her family during his visit to York and described him as "a wonderful human being". She received an email from him 24 hours before he was killed, voicing his fears about his safety. She said: "At the start of January, David was celebrating a major success. He had persuaded a Ugandan court to issue an injunction against a local newspaper which had demanded that he and other identified gay activists were killed.

"Almost exactly a year ago, David arrived at the Centre to undertake a protective fellowship, designed to support human rights defenders at risk. He wanted support in his fight against the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which threatened the death penalty for "repeat offenders".

"He had a great sense of mischief and loved to shock with scurrilous stories." She said when he returned home, his bags were "overflowing with presents" and said: "The world is poorer for his loss."

Mary Machen, secretary of York One World Linking Association, sat next to Mr Kato last May during an event at York St John University. She said: "His warm personality made it easy to get straight down to a discussion about the challenges of his work in Uganda."

Rachel Woolley, of the York Branch of Amnesty International, said: "Many of us met David Kato during his time in York and we're all deeply shocked and saddened by the news of his death."

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