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**Gay activist in the eyes of his friends and foes**

By Eunice Rukundo erukondo@ug.nationmedia.com

It may be a while before another death in Uganda kicks up as much dust as David Kato Kisule’s last month. Kato is the Ugandan gay rights activist who was bludgeoned with a hammer to death in broad daylight a fortnight ago.

Kato’s murder angered some Ugandans, confused others and stirred up emotions across the globe.

“I am deeply saddened to learn of the murder of David Kato. In Uganda, David showed tremendous courage in speaking out against hate. He was a powerful advocate for fairness and freedom. The United States mourns his murder, and we recommit ourselves to David’s work,” said US President Barack Obama.

Until his death, different people knew Kato differently, depending on how they related with him, which explains the different takes on his death.

Kato’s sexuality first became a national issue in October last year after Uganda’s *Rolling Stone* tabloid front-paged his picture among others under the headline ‘Hang Them, they are after our kids: Pictures of top 100 Homos.’

In the case Pepe Onziema & Ors vs *Rolling Stone*, a Ugandan court held that homosexuals are entitled to the right to privacy like any other citizen and awarded the plaintiffs damages of Sh40,000.

So who was David Kato.

His cousin Claire Nakato, 43, who would help Kato with errands and household chores, had noticed that only carefully chosen visitors came to his home, most of them male.

“There were no women friends that you could say he was in a relationship with. There was instead a particular man who visited frequently, sometimes spending the night there,” she recalls.

Claire had heard rumours about Kato’s sexuality but she had never bothered to verify them.

“I now understand why he only laughed at my pestering him to get married. It was his life though; he was an adult so whatever he wanted to do with his life was his business,” she says.

In a country whose culture and traditions are largely uncompromising on issues relating to sexuality, not everyone was as accommodating as Claire was.

“If I had known what he was involved in and where he got his money from, I wouldn’t have taken it. I wish I could return it all,” swore one of the women keeping vigil at Kato’s home after the murder. She was referring to Kato’s generosity.

But Kato was a different man to different people. An advocacy officer for the gay rights group, Sexual Minorities Uganda, Kato was a teacher by profession only becoming a prominent gay rights campaigner in recent years.

“David juggled almost every responsibility within the movement, his major concern our safety. He hated red tape and in most cases he came off as a leader in his own way,” says Val Kalende, a fellow activist.

According to Kalende, David was quick to respond when the security of his ilk was at stake. For that, he was nicknamed “security”.

“It didn’t matter who you were, he reached out to help you. He fed, dressed, comforted and housed many members of the community who were homeless,” adds Kalende.

However, not everyone seems to have appreciated his altruism, as one member of the community, who claims to have been an ex-lover to Kato, says.

“When I heard Kato was dead, I was saddened but also relieved. He was such an assuming person who thought he was better than anyone else, even amongst the gay community.”

Paul Kagaba, a former homosexual now crusading against gay practices, and who claims to have first met Kato in Masaka during a school holiday at a time when Kato was the headmaster of a primary school, describes him as loud, rude and arrogant.

“Some people found him impatient and sometimes rude but that was his way of getting things done. He didn’t mince his words. He told it as it was. His selfless leadership endeared many of us to him,” says Kalende.

The motif in Kato’s story from whomever you hear it is that he was a generous man.

“He was public spirited and generous. He settled other people’s hospital bills and was among the first people to have electricity installed in the area,” recalls a local council chairman.

By now there seems to have been a flipside to Kato’s concern for the welfare of others.

Anti-gay crusader Kagaba, for instance believes that the façade was used to trap people and use them for his sexual satisfaction.

“I was young when I met him. He bought me my first take-away meal ever and two beers. I ended up in his house being sexually used which is how I was initiated into homosexuality. That’s how he always initiated other people then indoctrinated them against women, insisting they were filthy,” claims Kagaba.

On Thursday a press statement posted on the Uganda Media Centre website of the Office of the President, Uganda, reported that a suspect, Nsubuga Enock aka Sydney, had confessed to murdering Kato.

According to the site, the suspect’s police statement indicated that he bludgeoned Kato to death after the latter failed to reward him for sexual services.

“He (Nsubuga) told us that he killed Kato after he failed to give him a car, a house and money he promised as rewards for having sex with him,” the *Daily Monitor* quoted police sources as saying.

According to the *Monitor,* “Kato is alleged to have bailed the suspect (Nsubuga) out of Kawuga Prison on January 24, where he been remanded on charges of theft of a mobile phone. The suspect told police that he stayed with Kato for two days. He accused the deceased of having sex with him and promising to pay him during the period. The suspect allegedly told the police he got tired of having sex with Kato but the latter would not have any of his excuses.”

And more worms are crawling from the woodwork.

“Whoever knew Kato and is truthful, knows that he was not a kind, generous person but a sly show off, popular in bars where he offered free drinks to unsuspecting victims who he later initiated into sexual partnerships,” says Kagaba.

A member of the Ugandan gay community writes on the BlogSpot GayUgandan that there were times when Kato’s drinking worried them.

“When we had dated (for) a while I asked him to take an HIV test with me after hearing rumours that he could be infected. His refusal confirmed my fears and I left him. I always thought that his positive status, which most people didn’t know about, could have been the reason for his over-drinking…,” writes the blogger.

A doctor told us that Kato was HIV positive, having confirmed his status in December 2008.

“In fact the day he was murdered at his home I was expecting him at the hospital but he didn’t show up,” adds the doctor who requested anonymity.

According to Kato’s cousin Nakato, there were days Kato would stay indoors all the day, saying he was unwell.

We established that Kato’s father was long dead. During Kato’s burial his mother, who lives in Masaka, refused to talk about the son saying he had caused enough chaos already.

Acquaintances we talked to said Kato had a twin brother and a sister that no one seems to know anything about.

For all that came to life in his death, the details of his family may be the one thing the public will never get to know.