



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**The Advocates for Human Rights Calls for Immediate and Thorough Investigation into the Torture and Murder of Prominent Cameroonian LGBT Rights Activist Eric Ohena Lembembe**

**Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN (7/16/2013)** – The Advocates for Human Rights extends its condolences to the Cameroonian Foundation for AIDS (CAMFAIDS) on the news that its Executive Director, Eric Ohena Lembembe, has been killed. Cameroonian authorities should conduct an immediate and thorough investigation of Lembembe’s apparent torture and murder and prosecute those who are responsible for this crime. The Advocates knew Lembembe as an outspoken activist for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people. In February, a fact-finding team from The Advocates for Human Rights working in Cameroon had the privilege of meeting Lembembe and other courageous CAMFAIDS human rights defenders. They learned about CAMFAIDS’ courageous work to end discrimination and persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

In Cameroon, people who are LGBTI face pervasive societal stigma, discrimination, and harassment. They also face the possibility of imprisonment - Article 347 of the Cameroonian penal code criminalizes “sexual relations with a person of the same sex”. At least 28 people have been prosecuted under the law since 2010. LGBTI individuals – particularly those who are prominent activists like Lembembe – also risk their lives on a daily basis in Cameroon. Tragically, Lembembe’s life ended this week with what appears to be torture and murder.

Human rights defenders in Cameroon face death threats, break-ins, and harassment by “anti-gay hooligans,” – as Lembembe recently dubbed them - who operate with impunity in Cameroon. The Government of Cameroon has turned a blind eye to anti-LGBTI violence. Indeed, as The Advocates learned during its interviews with Cameroonian organizations working on LGBTI rights, law enforcement officials frequently harass and abuse people they suspect of being LGBTI.

Kara Lyons, an attorney with Faegre Baker Daniels and volunteer who met with Lembembe on behalf of The Advocates in Cameroon, described him with one word: “inspiring.” Of Lembembe and his colleagues from CAMFAIDS, she said, “It was striking to be in their presence and to see how passionate they were about the cause.”

In addition to investigating Lembembe’s death and prosecuting his murderer or murderers, the Cameroonian government must repeal Article 347 and take steps to address violence against LGBTI persons in Cameroon. “The government must protect the rights of all Cameroonians, regardless of sexual orientation or identity,” said Deputy Director Jennifer Prestholdt, who was in Cameroon with The Advocates’ team in February. “When things change in Cameroon, as they must, the credit will go to Eric Ohena Lembembe and the other brave activists who have put their hearts and souls and lives on the line to advance the cause of LGBTI rights.”

For more information, please contact:

Robin Phillips  
Executive Director  
(612) 746-4679  
[rphillips@advrights.org](mailto:rphillips@advrights.org)

Jennifer Prestholdt  
Deputy Director  
(612) 746-4681  
[jprestholdt@advrights.org](mailto:jprestholdt@advrights.org)

###

*The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is dedicated to the promotion and protection of internationally-recognized human rights. To learn more about The Advocates' local, national, and international work, visit [theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org).*