Beat: Lifestyle

Kenyan president signs law legalizing polygamy for men

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USPA News - A law allowing men in Kenya to marry as many women as they want was signed into law Tuesday by President Uhuru Kenyatta, even though the law does not give women the same right and does not allow first wives to veto their husband`s decision. A statement from the presidency on Tuesday said Kenyatta had signed into law Marriage Bill 2014, despite criticism from women`s rights groups which have vowed to mount a legal challenge against the law.

The bill does not include previous proposals to recognize cohabiting or to ban bride price payments. "According to the Act, marriage is the voluntary union of a man and a woman whether in a monogamous or polygamous union registered under the Act," the presidency said in Tuesday`s statement. "It states that parties to a marriage have equal rights and obligations at the time of marriage, during the marriage and at the dissolution of the marriage. All marriages registered under the Act have the same legal status." Most controversial, the law legalizes polygamy, allowing men to marry as many women as they want without having to consult their first wives. Women, however, will not be allowed to marry multiple men and a previous proposal that would have allowed first wives to veto their husband`s decision was eventually dropped. Women`s rights groups have strongly condemned the bill, which received overwhelming support from male members of parliament. "In marriage a man and a woman are equal partners and therefore there has to be consultations on matters that affect the marriage like bringing an additional wife," Kenya`s Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) said earlier this month. "Kenya is a progressive country and therefore its legislation must be in that context too: to promote gender equality and not used selectively to favor one gender." The polygamy law brings civil law into line with customary law, in which some cultures allow multiple partners, though first wives are traditionally supposed to consent. In addition to allowing polygamy, Marriage Bill 2014 also bans marriage for those under the age of 18 and requires all marriages - even customary unions - to be registered. And while the bill specifies that marriage is between a man and a woman, in a country where homosexual acts are punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment, the bill does not explicitly ban the custom of older women who have no children and are past menopause to marry a younger woman. The younger woman then finds a man to become pregnant, allowing the women to raise the child together, though the women are not supposed to have a sexual relationship together.

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