

## Reggae artistes blacklisted

GERMANY, Europe's largest economy, has blacklisted 11 dancehall albums between 2008 and January 2010 this year because of their homophobic and violent content.

Albums by Sizzla, Elephant Man, Bounty Killer, Capleton, TOK and Baby Cham are on this list, or "index", compiled by the German Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons (BPjM) Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien in German. Stakeholders counter that up to 35 dancehall albums or songs had been blacklisted since the BPjM's conception including Legalise It by reggae icon Peter Tosh, which was later removed. The BPjM told the Sunday Observer that it is illegal to advertise these albums or to sell them to minors in Germany, with additional restrictions placed on their sale and distribution. "Breach of ...[the] indexing is punishable by a fine or imprisonment," stated Corinna Bochmann, BPjM spokesperson. Ten of the 11 albums were not only considered "harmful to young people" but also contained violent lyrics, according to the BPjM, with lyrics that incite hatred and propagate to kill homosexuals. The BPjM indexed these albums following complaints by certain groups such as the German gay lobby. "The BPjM can only act on the request of other administrative institutions, not by itself. Once an official request has been filed, the BPjM is obliged to act," stated Bochmann. Ellen Köhlings, editor of German reggae magazine Riddim said that dancehall is ironically fulfilling the gay lobby's agenda. "These lyrics violate German laws which gives the lobbyists legal grounds to successfully censor music and gain media exposure," Köhlings said. "The gay lobby is looking for cheap forwards just like some artistes look for a cheap forward," she stated. Köhlings added that artistes could compromise by maintaining their anti-gay stance but avoid the use of violence. "At the end of the day there are much more urgent things to talk about than homophobia, and artistes should leave out, in my mind, the violent bashing of gays." Riddim magazine has at times assumed the role of dancehall mediator, as the industry has no lobby in Germany: "We have been doing everything we can to restore the image of Jamaica, but we can do only so much. In the long run Jamaica needs to take action," Köhlings noted. Violent anti-gay lyrics have been a feature of dancehall music for over 15 years with the Buju Banton classic Boom Bye Bye credited as its progenitor. The international gay lobby, in response, has petitioned the German government to ban shows and the sale of records by these artistes. Last year, Banton and Beenie Man were yanked from shows due to the lobby in the US, Australia and New Zealand. Local gay organisation J-Flag said that Jamaican deejays are not being unfairly attacked by the international gay community. "Their music promotes violence, hate and hardship for members of a community that at no time has threatened or hurt them in any way. This is an unwarranted and unprovoked assault on a set of people who have a right to exist," stated Jason McFarlane, J-Flag programmes manager. He added that dancehall artistes who continue to perform "hate-filled music" must be held accountable. "The influence of music on any society must not be under-estimated. What must be understood is that artistes have a right to express what they feel but also must be held responsible for the possible impact they can have on people. Music, in particular Reggae and Dancehall, is universal and so we must be aware of the wide reach of the possible influence of any one artiste." -Jamaica Observer