

# JWG Outraged by Hate Speech Against Lesbians and Gays

Wednesday, 23 July 2008

The Joint Working Group (JWG) a network representing 24 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) organizations throughout South Africa was outraged by a column that appeared in the Sunday Sun on 20 July 2008 (Call me names, but gay is not ok) that is filled with hate speech against lesbian and gay people.

The column is filled with vitriolic rhetoric aimed against lesbians and gays. It also promotes the denial of the basic human rights of lesbian and gay people. We are deeply offended that Jon Qwelane wrote such a piece and that the Sunday Sun published it alongside an equally offensive cartoon.

The Joint Working Group is of the view that the article exceeds the bounds of free speech in terms of the Constitution as it advocates hatred on the grounds of a person's preference for having relationships with members of the same sex.

The Joint Working Group was specifically angered by the following:

- The "cartoon" accompanying the article falls in the worst tradition of the discriminatory caricature, with the insidious suggestion that same-sex relationships are akin to bestiality;
- The article continuously makes derogatory reference to gay and lesbian people solely based on their sexual orientation;
- The article is offensive to women;
- Qwelane's approval of the abhorrent human rights abuses being perpetuated against LGBTI people in Zimbabwe as a result of Robert Mugabe's "approach" is disgraceful.
- The writer shows a total disregard for the South African Human Rights Commission which is the structure legally mandated to protect human rights of all South Africans.

We cannot ignore the context in which such a column is occurring. The decision to publish this article was particularly irresponsible in light of the growing trend of well-publicised hate crimes (including rape and murder) perpetrated against LGBTI people in South Africa today. Views such as those of Qwelane stoke the flames of homophobia and, inevitably, lead to violence against all those who are marginalised and stigmatised in our communities.

In light of the scandalous slander of an entire community, the JWG has decided, along with like minded organisations, immediately to lay an official complaint before the South African Human Rights Commission and the Press Ombudsman. It will also consider all other legal options for taking this matter forward so as to ensure that the poisonous pen of a writer such as Qwelane does not imperil the rights of all LGBTI people in South Africa.

For more information contact the JWG or a member organisation in your area.

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Activate WITS  
Behind the Mask  
Coalition of African Lesbians  
Durban Gay and Lesbian Community  
D Gayle  
Forum for the Empowerment of Women  
Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action  
Gay and Lesbian Network (PMB)  
Gender Dynamix  
Glorious Light MCC  
Good Hope MCC  
Hope and Unity MCC  
IAM  
Jewish Outlook  
Out in Africa  
OUT LGBT Well-being

OUT Rhodes  
Rainbow UCT  
SAYLO  
The Inner Circle  
Lesbian and Gay Equality Project  
Triangle Project  
Unisa Centre for Applied Psychology  
XX/Y Flame

The Joint Working Group, established in 2003, is a national network of 24 organisations of and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (hereinafter referred to as LGBTI people) in South Africa representing the organised LGBTI sector, acting and speaking in the interest of our respective and diverse constituencies. We exist to advance and promote the rights of LGBTI people through constructive dialogue and collaboration, social mobilisation, public education to strengthen positive expressions, advocacy and research. More info: <http://www.jwg.org.za>