

PRESS RELEASE

Press statement on IDAHOT 2017

South Africa, 17 May 2017

Today marks once more the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT), where we commemorate the trials and triumphs made in the fight for queer rights across the planet. The theme for 2017 is 'family'. As activists and members of the LGBTI community, the day is a sad reminder of the ever-present nature of homophobia and transphobia in our country and across the world. Many of us have lost family members and loved-ones to violence and discrimination, and many tight-knit communities have been shaken by violence in recent months.

The number of attacks in recent months against lesbian South Africans has shocked and saddened us. Since this time last year, at least three lesbian women have been raped and attacked in the North West Province; Khayelitsha-based LGBTI activist, Noluvo Swelindawo, was murdered; in Kroonstad in the Free State, young Nonki Smous was killed and her body burnt. Less than a week ago, a young lesbian woman was stoned to death in Soweto. All signs point to the attackers being friends or acquaintances of many of these victims.

But homophobia and transphobia do not manifest themselves only in this way. The forced 'outing' of 38 lesbian students at an Eastern Cape school, shows the level of latent homophobia within those to whom we entrust the safety and education of our youth- while the anger expressed by some of the girls' parents at discovering the sexuality of their children exemplifies how often our families fail to accept or understand us. Countless queer lives have been harmed due to a lack of family support, or from the discrimination of educators or caretakers.

There has been progress as well, and we must always look to the future and take pride in our successes. The fight is long and painful, but IDAHOT presents the chance to take stock and show the world our resolve.

Irantí-org, with the help of our partners, has worked to document, investigate, seek justice for, and lend support to the families of the victims of hate crimes. We have also made strides with a number of cases, with Nare Mphela's long-awaited victory against the Limpopo Department of Education for discrimination due to her gender identity. We are also currently investigating a case of alleged discrimination against a transgender woman at a women's shelter, and are offering support to the complainant and pursuing justice.

Discrimination remains ever-present in all aspects of life, but we remain resolute in our fight against homophobia and transphobia. Irantí-org will continue to work together with others towards a better future for all members of the LGBT community, and we wish you all strength in the months ahead.