

Govt team to fight gay hate crimes

Johannesburg - A national task team will be set up to tackle hate crimes against lesbians and gays, the justice and constitutional development ministry said on Wednesday.

The decision came in response to a 170 000-strong, Change.org campaign calling for action on "corrective rape", spokesperson [Tlali Tlali](#) said in a statement.

It followed the murder of lesbian activist Noxolo Nogwaza, 24, who was stoned, stabbed with broken glass and gang-raped in Kwa-Thema township, Johannesburg last month.

Used condoms, a beer bottle and a large rock were found on or beside Nogwaza's body. She was a member of the Ekurhuleni Pride Organising Committee.

"Corrective rape" is a hate crime in which men rape lesbians to "cure" them of their sexual orientation.

Working with officials

Tlali said the decision to set up a task team was taken on Tuesday during a meeting at Parliament of senior officials and activists. It would begin deliberations on July 15.

It would include six representatives from the judiciary and the police and social development, and six representatives from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.

"The team will be charged with developing a legislative intervention plan, a public awareness strategy, and LGBTI-sensitive shelters," he said.

In response to the government action, Ndumie Funda, founder of Luleki Sizwe, an organisation that advocates for the rights of township lesbians, said: "It shows that they are willing to work with the gay community, but we continue to fight for LGBTI rights until the last drops of blood are spilled."

Benjamin Joffe-Walt, a representative of Change.org, said what the campaign accomplished was "remarkable".

"In less than six months, a tiny group of township activists have mobilised more than 170 000 people from 163 countries and [got] the highest levels of government to address their basic demand, that the sadistic crime of 'corrective rape' be taken seriously."

Preventative measures

Intervention options discussed at the meeting included: amending the Sexual Offences Act to include the victim's sexual orientation as an aggravating factor, which would lead to heavier sentences.

Preventative measures such as allowing for equality courts to address harassment, discrimination or hate speech, and consultations on minimum sentences for hate crimes, including rape on the basis of sexual orientation, were also considered.

The National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa on Wednesday called on the ANC Women's League to raise awareness of gay and lesbian rights.

"The front-line role of the ANCWL will go a long way in creating a climax of understanding and acceptance of gay and lesbian people as an... integral part of our society," spokesperson Castro Ngobese said.

"Gay and lesbian people have a right to exist and be free in our country without any fear or threats of murder or intimidation."

No arrests for Nogwaza's death

Human Rights Watch told French news agency AFP on Tuesday that evidence suggested Nogwaza had been targeted because she was a lesbian, and that the murder "appears to be the latest in an epidemic of brutal homophobic attacks".

The attack is said to be reminiscent of the 2008 murder of Eudy Simelane, who played for the SA women's national soccer team.

Simelane's partially-clothed body was found in an open field in KwaThema. She had been gang raped, beaten, and stabbed 25 times in the face, chest, and legs.

Two men were found guilty of the killing, and two others acquitted.

Police spokesperson Colonel Tshisikhawe Ndou said on Wednesday no arrests for Nogwaza's murder had been made yet, and investigations were continuing.