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STATEMENT: GENDER BASED VIOLENCE CONTINUES INTO 2020

Iranti mourns the murders of three queer womxn.

9 January 2020 - Mmabatho “Madonna” James left her family home for the last time when she went out to buy cigarettes with an acquaintance on 29 November 2019, this was the last time Madonna’s family and friends would see her alive. Madonna was found murdered the next day, stoned to death and possibly raped.

Two days later in rural Mpumalanga, Portia Simphiwe Mtsweni’s body was found by community members. She was murdered and mutilated near a primary school in the area.

2019 closed with the killings of these lesbian womxn and countless others in its folds, all by the hands of men.

Barely a week into 2020 the body of activist Nare Mphela, a transgender womxn from Limpopo was found murdered and brutalised near Mokopane CBD, a small town in the province on Sunday.

Whilst the deaths of these womxn are difficult to fathom and the details of their deaths quite distressing, nothing can make the violence that LGBTQI+ persons face palatable. There are no words, only these stark reminders that the spectrum of the LGBTQI+ existence is marred, irrevocably, by loss. Every day the threat of violence looms over queer people like a persistent dark cloud. It is disheartening that the new decade opened with these tragedies. LGBTQIA+ persons are often forced into the corners of society because of stigma, discrimination and this exact threat of violence. Those brave enough to live our truth are sometimes condemned to death by a society that refuses to make space for us.

The events of the past few weeks reminds us of the need for urgent interventions regarding the livelihoods of LGBTQI+ persons and of the importance of affirming queer life through consistent engagement with the state, civil society, the private sector and members of the public.

Besides the constant threat of danger that LGBTQIA+ persons routinely face they are also not guaranteed justice. Constitutional rights are not protected, valued and often denied assistance from the police, as is the case in the murders of Mmabatho, Portia and Nare. Police response is often slow and inadequate, leaving distraught families with few answers and many questions as to the circumstances regarding the death of their loved ones.

This disengagement from the police and government is a constant feature of LGBTQI+ experience. As activists, concerned citizens, parents, lovers friends we are compelled to fight for the affordance of human rights to all. As LGBTQI+ persons we are compelled to continue affirming our lives through mourning each other and calling the state institutions that fail us to account.

It must be recognised that transphobia by the state continues to make trans persons vulnerable to violence and that the ongoing murders against lesbians despite legal protections speak to poor messaging from the state.

The brutal realities that queer persons face on a daily basis will only shift if these sectors play an active role in dismantling the normalising of violence faced by the the LGBTQI+ communities in South Africa.

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