



Freedom is not Free

Dear South Africa, we need to talk.

Most of us know that the 27th of April, our Freedom Day, signifies the end of an oppressive era. Our country boasts a strong constitution, and is one of the most developed countries in Africa. On this day we celebrate our constitutional democracy and all the benefits that it has brought to us. Yet, how many of us are actually free?

The basic understanding of freedom, and Freedom Day, is that it implies that all people are free from poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia and various other forms of discrimination; free to participate in society as themselves without fear of stigma and violence. If this the case then “freedom” in South Africa applies only to a few privileged citizens.

In the North West Province alone, there has been a rise in violence against the LGBTI community, while in the rest of South Africa many black queer bodies must still consider which spaces are “safe” before navigating them. The idea that one could be attacked, raped or murdered because of your identity at any given moment is not a sign of a free nation.

The *Prevention and combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill* defines a hate crime as:

“an offence recognised under any law, the commission of which by a person is motivated on the basis of that person’s prejudice, bias or intolerance towards the victim of the hate crime in question because of one or more of the following characteristics or perceived characteristics of the victim or his or her family member: Race; gender; sex, which includes intersex; ethnic or social origin; colour; sexual orientation; religion; belief; culture; language; birth; disability; HIV status; nationality; gender identity; albinism; or occupation or trade.”

In the past Year alone, we have seen a rise in hate crimes, yet police, courts and the government remain slow to act.

On the 1st of July 2017, Pitso Tshelang, a transgender woman from the town of Swartruggens, was murdered after *an argument in a local tavern about her gender-identity. Pitso’s attacker stabbed her repeatedly with a broken bottle. She passed away before she could be taken to the local hospital.*

On the 6th of January 2018, Kagiso Maema of Rustenburg *was last seen with an unknown man at a local tavern. Kagiso, a transgender woman, was found dead in a field the next day; her face covered with a plastic bag and with severe cut wounds on her body.* No arrests have been made.

Iranti is currently producing a documentary to look at the atrocious violence being directed at LGBTI women. We work every day with brave allies from a number of organisations and communities to ensure that we put an end to the hatred and violence; to ensure that every South African can enjoy true freedom.

This Freedom Day, stand with us in remembrance of those who we lost to tyranny in all its forms. Stand with us as we remember the countless lives destroyed by Apartheid, colonialism and genocide; stand with us as we remember Marikana, Life Esidimeni, and young Michael Komape; stand with us as we mourn our queer siblings, taken from us by hate and ignored by the media.

And stand with us as we move forward and continue the fight for freedom.

Regards,
The Iranti-org team