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[STATEMENT] Human Rights for queer persons in a time of COVID-19

21 March 2020 - Iranti would like to take into consideration the challenges the citizens of our country went through to ensure we as a country can celebrate Human Rights Day with dignity. We cannot, however, look away from the basic human rights that are still not afforded to many persons who form part of our community - *queer persons, sex workers, domestic workers* - who are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations due to their positionality in our South African society and therefore face multiple levels of exclusions and discrimination. In this time as a country, as a region and the globe, the outbreak of COVID-19 brings multiple implications to many in our community and we would like to highlight some of those here:

1) Discrimination in the healthcare system:

Many in our community have reported their experiences with health care professionals who have discriminated against them because of their Sexual Orientations, Gender Identity and Expressions; these experiences may deter them from seeking safe and hygienic medical care in future, leading to a denial of a basic human rights as stipulated in Section 27 of our Bill of Rights.

2) Economic Exclusion,

Many in our community form part of the working class and the informal trade/s in our country, because of discrimination and a lack of policy inclusion and protection of Queer rights. This makes the practice of social distancing difficult due to the idea of: “if you don’t work, you don’t eat” - making our community susceptible to contracting the virus, despite Section 22 of our Bill of Rights stating citizens have the ‘freedom of trade, occupation or profession’.

3) Immunodeficiency

TB, HIV and AIDS are prevalent in our community for a variety of reasons – There was AIDS denialism among other things – but this means that there are large numbers of people within our community with compromised immune systems - leaving us more vulnerable to COVID-19 infections.

Iranti would like to appeal to all people living in and visiting the country to follow and for government to enforce compliance with the guidelines of the National Disaster Act particularly, regulations around alcohol as women, children and queer persons are especially vulnerable to violence caused by excessive use of alcohol in communities.

We call on all religious groups to act responsibly and cancel all services. We consider any religious groups insistence on holding services as irresponsible and unlawful.

Iranti notes that Human Rights should be afforded to all and that no one population should be placed above the other. But we note with grave concern the sharp challenges of realising and implementing the rights of queer persons in South Africa during this time - access to basic human rights such as health care, decent pay, decent work, and housing should be for all – not only in the time of great uncertainty because of COVID-19, but continuously and consistently.

Happy Human Rights Day, South Africa

May we heal together, may we practice physical distancing and social solidarity.

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