

TAC condemns hate murders

By *moderator*

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TAC has learnt from the Positive Women's Network that on Sunday 8 July in Soweto Meadowlands, Sizakele Sigasa, an outreach coordinator at Positive Women's Network and a lesbian and gay rights activist, and her friend Salome Masooa, were tortured and brutally murdered. Sizakele was found with her hands tied together by her underpants and her ankles tied together by her shoelaces, with three bullet holes in her head and three in her collarbone.

This appears to have been a hate crime, committed by people who are intolerant of women and lesbians.

Many of us in TAC knew Sizakele. We express our deep condolences to the family and friends of Sizakele and Salome.

The high level of violence against women in South Africa is caused by a complex set of intertwined factors. Some of these such as poverty, unemployment and cultural attitudes that promote machismo will take generations to resolve. But there are measures that can be taken now to reduce violence against women:

- All civil society organizations (including human rights, women's, lesbian & gay and HIV/AIDS organizations) must join in a community-based drive to fight gender-based violence and homophobia. This must include tolerance and diversity education in schools. Civil society must be at the forefront of this effort. Government cannot do it alone. It lacks the capacity and the political will.
- Government must address the police force's ineffectiveness, exacerbated by corruption at the highest levels of the department. Police on the beat need to be much more visible in townships and their needs to be public confidence that phoning the police emergency number is likely to result in timely action.
- Crime must be treated as an emergency with clear short-term and time-bound demands on the justice system such as 24 hour courts. Drafting of attorneys as prosecutors and public defenders as a short-term emergency measure and community service for all LL.B graduates should be implemented. There must be a recruitment drive for more public prosecutors. The justice system must be reformed to deal much more quickly with case backlogs.
- Communities must compel shebeens to have properly trained security guards who prevent violence and

intervene to stop violence when it occurs.

- Public transport systems must be upgraded so that buses, trains and taxis are secure and drop people closer to their homes. The 2010 World Cup Soccer tournament offers an opportunity to make substantial investments in public transport that benefit working-class and poor people.
- Municipalities must prioritise street lighting in all neighbourhoods, as well as closed-circuit cameras.
- Life-skills education at schools must emphasise women's rights and the unacceptability of violence against women and all hate crimes including anti-semitism, homophobia, Islamophobia and bullying.
- Social security and job-creation must be scaled up. Micro-finance programmes aimed at women, such as the one run by RADAR in Acornhoek, should be implemented widely. Greater financial independence will give women including lesbians and bisexual women more ability to leave or not to enter abusive relationships.
- More programmes and centres aimed at giving men dignity must be introduced in high unemployment areas. These include sports centres, education programmes and public works.
- Government and institutional public education programmes that emphasise equality and tolerance of sexual diversity must be scaled up.
- Communities need to form organisations to stand up against violence against women and pressurise the justice system. This has happened, for example, in some parts of Khayelitsha.

● In addition to the above, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis and rape counselling should be available in far more health facilities without the requirement of a police report.

The TAC joins the call by Positive Women's Network for the police to act swiftly and bring to justice the people who murdered Sizakele and Salome.

We ask the the Legal and Human Rights Sector of SANAC to convene a meeting of all civil society organizations to plan a sustained, persistent and ongoing campaign against gender-based violence and hate crimes.

TAC members will join the memorial service and funeral for Sizakele and Salome. For further information, please contact Prudence Mabele of Postive Women's Network on 078 383 9529.

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