

## **Statement from the Anglican Bishops in Southern African on the Imprisonment of Stephen Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga**

<http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?ItemID=265&tname=tblComponent1&oname=News&pg=front>

We, the Bishops of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa call upon the Government of South Africa to seek the release of Stephen Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, who were recently sentenced in Malawi to 14 years imprisonment with hard labour, after they shared in a traditional ceremony of engagement.

As we have previously stated, though there is a breadth of theological views among us on matters of human sexuality, we are united in opposing the criminalisation of homosexual people. We see the sentence that has been handed down to these two individuals as a gross violation of human rights and we therefore strongly condemn such sentences and behaviour towards other human beings. We emphasize the teachings of the Scriptures that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore must be treated with respect and accorded human dignity. .

These principles are at the heart of South Africa's own Constitution, whose provisions we see as setting an example for the world to follow. We therefore call on our President and Government to pursue the same values and standards for the upholding of human well-being, dignity and respect, in our external relations; to engage in dialogue with their counterparts on the rights of minorities; and to oppose any measures which demean and oppress individuals, communities, or groups of people. In particular we call on our President and Government to lobby the Government of Malawi at every level to uphold the commitment it shares through the SADC treaty to promote human rights (Article 4). We urge them to press for the swift release of these two individuals, who have committed no act of violence or harm against anyone; for the quashing of the sentence against them; and for the repeal of this repressive legislation.

More generally, we wish to reiterate our deep concern at the violent language used against the gay community across Sub-Saharan Africa, and at the increased legal action being taken against gay individuals, communities and organisations. Even in South Africa we are aware of instances of violence against the gay and lesbian community. We therefore appeal to law-makers everywhere to defend the rights of these minorities.

As Bishops we believe that it is immoral to permit or support oppression of, or discrimination against, people on the grounds of their sexual orientation, and contrary to the teaching of the gospel; particularly Jesus' command that we should love one another as he has loved us, without distinction (John 13:34-35). We commit ourselves to teach, preach and act against any laws that undermine human dignity and oppress any and all minorities, even as we call for Christians and all people to uphold the standards of holiness of life.