

## No To Qwelane as Ambassador

There is great concern in LGBTI circles regarding media reports that Jon Qwelane is to assume the role of S.A. Ambassador to Uganda. Recently the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project (LGEP) sent a letter to President Jacob Zuma, calling on him to reconsider this possible appointment.

In the column entitled Call me names, but Gay is not ok, which was accompanied by a cartoon connecting homosexuality with bestiality, Qwelane made derogatory references to lesbian and gay people based solely on their sexual orientation. This, writes the LGEP, is in "direct opposition to the constitutional protection enjoyed by all South Africans to not be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation."

A number of human rights activists across the country protested against the publishers and a complaint was lodged against Qwelane with the South African Human Rights Commission who has recently concluded its investigation into the complaints and should shortly hold a hearing.

The LGEP also wrote that many country people who are not heterosexual are assaulted, raped and murdered and emphasised that "hate speech far too often leads to hate crimes: loss of lives, dignity and freedom";

In a separate press release the Joint Working Group (JWG), a network of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex organisations throughout South Africa, has also voiced their concerns, especially the fact that Qwelane would be sent to Uganda if appointed, a country where a "brutally homophobic piece of legislation" is being debated at this time.

Jon Qwelane, says the JWG, has shown himself to be "openly and unapologetically homophobic and transphobic" and has also expressed support for Robert Mugabe's treatment of LGBTI people in Zimbabwe which is brutal and oppressive, to say the least. To send Qwelane to Uganda, where the anti-homosexuality bill is currently under discussion, is a matter of grave concern. Not only should Qwelane not be sent as Ambassador to Uganda, he should not even be considered a suitable representative of the state in any role, anywhere in the world.

In a separate interview, Liesl Theron of Gender Dynamix said that Gender Dynamix partners with Human Rights organisations in Uganda and that Gender Dynamix is very concerned about the situation there. She believes that sending Qwelane into Uganda would be detrimental to the human rights of the LGBTI community in both Uganda and South Africa.