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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law



CENTRE FOR SEXUALITIES,
AIDS AND GENDER

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (CHR) AND THE CENTRE FOR SEXUALITIES, AIDS AND GENDER (CSA&G) CONDEMN THE HOMOPHOBIC MASSACRE OF 50 GAY CLUB REVELLERS IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA, USA

14 June 2016

Sunday 12 June 2016 was a sad day in the history of the struggle for LGBTI rights in the world. Fifty revellers were gunned down at Pulse, a gay club in Orlando, Florida, USA. The gunman's actions were apparently inspired by his hatred for persons of a different sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Centre for Human Rights (CHR) and the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender (CSA&G), both at the University of Pretoria, believe in and work for the realisation of the rights of all persons on the African continent, including sexual minorities, based on the rights protected by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. We strongly condemn this heinous act, and call upon all to respect the rights of all persons around the globe irrespective of what or who they are.

Violence against persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity is a violation of international human rights law. In its 2015 *Report on Violence against LGBTI persons*, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights incorporated the concept of violence based on prejudice to examine violence committed against LGBTI persons. The Commission found that violence based on prejudice requires context and social complicity and has a symbolic impact, sending a message to the whole LGBTI community, and that the perpetrator's motivation needs to be understood as complex and multi-faceted, and not only as an individual act. So these acts, and the gunman in the Orlando massacre, are not individual exceptions, they are socially embedded and socially enabled. To prevent them requires a combination of legal and social reform, and the engagement of multiple actors in all societies.

The CHR has worked, together with other human rights organisations, to support the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' *Resolution on Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the basis of their real or imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity* (Resolution 275), passed by the Commission in May 2014. And the CSA&G plays an advocacy role in promoting an understanding of the complexities of sexuality and gender in the academy and in various social and organisational contexts.

The work of both Centres is informed by an understanding of the complexity of contexts across the African region, which has experienced its own share of violence perpetrated against persons because

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of their real or imputed sexual orientation or gender identity. From 'corrective rape' in South Africa, to killings and arbitrary arrests in Uganda, Nigeria, Senegal and Egypt, online and international news reports abound with stories of LGBTI persons persecuted for being who they are.

The Centre for Human Rights and the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender therefore stand in solidarity with the American civil rights movement, the LGBTI movement, and their leaders, on this sorrowful occasion when we mourn all those killed and wounded in the Orlando shooting, as well as their partners, friends and families. We note that not all of those killed or wounded were in fact from the LGBTI community and may have been in the Pulse club as friends, allies and supporters. All these lives matter.

We call upon the government of the United States of America, and indeed all governments, to acknowledge the rich diversity of their populace and to meaningfully challenge laws and social attitudes which enable such hate crimes. Our common humanity unites us and will carry us through. To the spirit of Ubuntu – you are because I am.

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