

19 May 2010

EMERGENCY PROTEST AGAINST VICTIMISATION & IMPRISONMENT OF GAY MEN IN MALAWI

Today at 11:15 am, a number of activists from SECTION27 incorporating the AIDS Law Project, Treatment Action Campaign, and OUT gathered outside the Malawian High Commission in Pretoria. We gathered with the purpose of protesting against the conviction of Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga on charges of gross indecency and unnatural acts. They will be sentenced tomorrow and could face up to 14 years in prison.

It was a peaceful picket but police were quickly dispatched to the High Commissioners office and engaged SECTION27 representatives, who explained our reasons for being there. After an hour of picketing, a representative of the Malawian government emerged and accepted the memo on behalf of the High Commissioner, Ms Mussa. In the memo, we expressed our horror at the conviction of the two. We also highlighted the fact that these laws stem from colonial times and are themselves in violation of several sections of the Malawian Constitution, not least of which are the protections of human dignity and equality. We called for the following actions:

1. Free Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga
2. Issue a statement to the world confirming your commitment to protect all people's dignity, equality and freedom; and
3. Provide leadership in Malawi and the continent to combat prejudice and homophobia.

The representative assured us that the Malawian government would be given the memo and a response will be sent to SECTION27. We hope that the government will respond timeously. We, along with our partners from South Africa, the continent and activists around the world will continue to hold a sustained campaign to free these men whose only crime is loving each other.