

Demand Justice for Jason Wessenaar

On 18th December 2011 Jason Wessenaar died after being stabbed seven times in the neck. It was 3am in the morning. He was 39. He had spent the night at his home in Pretoria West with friends. Nothing was stolen from his house. After crying out for help, and being heard by his neighbours, he died almost immediately. His murderers are still out there. The murder is being investigated by officers at Pretoria West police station. But so far there appears to have been no progress, and Jason's family is not being kept informed.

Below are the Closing Remarks made by Mark Heywood, the Deputy Chairperson of SANAC and Director of SECTION27, at a Memorial Service for Jason held on 23rd December 2011.

In the last two hours we have heard moving testimonies and memories of Jason from his friends and family. We have seen pictures of him, projected onto the wall of the Church. What we have seen and heard confirmed something that I have always suspected about Jason: he loved life and being alive, his beauty was matched by his personal warmth and integrity. Every picture captures him with that warm grin and often with his arms around people. He was a beautiful man and he also loved himself. He took joy in travel, places and people.

You might say this of many people in the world.

But what made Jason unusual was that he was able to combine this joy of living with a conscience and a commitment for equality and to fighting for other people's dignity. He was able to combine *his* love of life with a passion for social justice and *other people's* rights. That is what made him unusual.



Unfortunately, most people in the world who have the opportunity to enjoy life, use that opportunity in a selfish way. Jason demonstrated that it's possible to do it the other way, and as such he should be a model for millions. Jason showed that it's good:

- To love life
- To love good food and even wine
- To love people and to enjoy responsible sexual relationships
- To joy in places

But that you can do all of this in a way that tackles the world's problems rather than deepens them. In a society as full of blind selfishness as South Africa's that's a salutary lesson. Indeed it's an indictment on the selfish elites of our country. It is possible to live responsibly and in solidarity with others.

This afternoon Jason's friends and comrades have spoken about how:

- Jason first disclosed his HIV infection to a small circle of trusted friends, but later became open about his HIV infection to a much wider public, using his own body and life to try to break the stigma around HIV; bringing his passion and self-knowledge to often dry and tedious workshops about stigma.

- Jason was open and unashamed about being gay and able to make jokes of the prejudices of others as well as to challenge them. He did small 'invisible' things that made a difference to others, like hosting Christmas lunches and dinners for those many people who were estranged from their families because of their sexual orientation.
- Jason was an activist for ARV treatment access, continuing to fight for treatment for others even though he himself did not require treatment yet. He was a quiet, unassuming part of a movement that has bettered and saved the lives of millions of people with HIV.

Jason's brutal murder should remind us that it was the end-of-year murder and preventable death of two other people that led to the treatment access movement in South Africa. In November and December 1998, the deaths of Simon Nkoli and then Gugu Dlamini propelled many of us into action, leading directly to the formation of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

It is rare that we all find ourselves in the same room any more. But today – 12 years later -- many of us are gathered in this church to remember someone else that we did not expect to die. Here today are Mercy Makhalemela, Prudence Mablele, Revd J P Mokgeti Heath, Sharon Ekambaram, Pholokgolo Ramothwala, Criselda Kananda, Belinda and activist comrades from TAC and Beat it!, Yvette Raphael, Phindi Malaza, Luckboy Mkondwane – people who have travelled a long road together and have shown that it is possible to move mountains if we get organised to fight for life.

We should not be here.

Some people have spoken today of God's will and greater plan for Jason. But, as Masi has said, it cannot be any God's will that a person is brutally stabbed to death in the prime of his life.

We do not accept it.

It should not be that a person who has survived HIV and earned the right to life, should be murdered in the night and made to suffer the pain and brutality of assassin's knives.

It's for this reason that we should not just be here to lament Jason's murder, but – as we did 12 years ago - to commit and say that this is one murder too many. The night of December 18th should be a turning point, we have the power in this room – we are activists, we know how to persuade, cajole, argue, research, organise demonstrations, use the media and courts - but will we use this power again and mobilise with it?

We must start by ensuring justice for Jason. We must make sure that his murderers are identified, convicted and punished. And we will.

But then we must understand that fighting HIV is not enough. We must work with others in other social movements to ensure that there is a broader justice and equality in our society, one that eliminates prejudice, suffering, brutality, and a resignation to the unacceptable.

That would be a fitting tribute to Jason's life.

Please support our campaign for justice for Jason and many other victims of senseless murder. Call on the Minister of Safety and Security, the Gauteng Commissioner of Police and other leaders of government to ensure that Jason’s killers are brought to justice.

You can help by:

Signing the petition and returning it to us at justiceforjason@section27.org.za .

Signed By/Position

Organisation

Date

Sending e-mails and letters appealing for a proper investigation into Jason’s murder to:		Please also copy:	
Minister of Police Nkosinathi Mthethwa	Gauteng Commissioner of Police Mzwandile Petros	Minister of Health Dr. Pakishe Aaron Motsoaledi	Chairperson of SANAC Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe
Private Bag X463, PRETORIA, 0001 Fax:(012) 393 2812 Fax:(021) 467 7036 MashegoAmeliah@saps.org.za	Fax: 086 6301686 gpprovcommpa@saps.gov.za	Fax: 012 395 9019 Postal address: Private Bag X828 Pretoria 0001 Cape Town Private Bag X9070 Cape Town, 8000 Fax: (021) 465 1575 sethom@health.gov.za or pardep@health.org.za	Fax: (0)12 323 8246 (0)21 462 2838 Vincent@po.gov.za

For further information write to justiceforjason@section27.org.za or contact:

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Nombulelo Mjele 0836054949, Family Spokesperson

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