

This document was excerpted from an email that was sent to the CFA's representative on FPSE's Status of Women Committee

Dear friends,

'Corrective rape', the vicious practice of raping lesbians to 'cure' their sexuality, is becoming a crisis in South Africa. But brave activists are calling on the world to help stop these heinous Hate Crimes -- and finally the government is beginning to respond. Let's support them. Sign the petition and send it to friends!

Sign the petition! https://secure.avaaz.org/en/stop_corrective_rape/?cl=918903821&v=8241

Millicent Gaika was bound, strangled, tortured and raped for five hours by a man who crowed that he was 'curing' her of her lesbianism.

She barely survived, but she is not alone -- this vicious crime is recurrent in South Africa, where lesbians live in terror of attack. But no one has ever been convicted of 'corrective rape'.

Amazingly, from a tiny Cape Town safehouse a few brave activists are risking their lives to ensure that Millicent's case sparks change. Their appeal to the Minister of Justice has exploded to over 140,000 signatures, forcing him to respond on national television. But the Minister has not yet answered their demands for action.

Let's shine a light on this horror from all corners of the world -- if enough of us join in to amplify and escalate this campaign, we can reach President Zuma, who is ultimately responsible to uphold constitutional rights. Let's call on Zuma and the Minister of Justice to publicly condemn 'corrective rape', criminalise hate crimes, and ensure immediate enforcement, public education and protection for survivors. Sign the petition now and share it with everyone -- we'll deliver it to the South African government with our partners in Cape Town:

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South Africa, often called the Rainbow Nation, is revered globally for its post-apartheid efforts to protect against discrimination. It was the first country to constitutionally protect citizens from discrimination based on sexuality. But in Cape Town alone, the local organization Luleki Sizwe has recorded more than one 'corrective rape' per day, and impunity reigns.

'Corrective rape' is based on the outrageous and utterly false notion that a lesbian woman can be raped to 'make her straight', but this heinous act is not even classified as a hate crime in South Africa. The victims are often black, poor, lesbian women, and profoundly marginalised. But even the 2008 gang rape and murder of Eudy Simelane, the national hero and former star of the South Africa women's national football team, did not turn the tide. And just last week Minister Radebe insisted that motive is irrelevant in crimes like 'corrective rape.'

South Africa is the rape capital of the world. A South African girl born today is more likely to be raped than she is to learn to read. Astoundingly, one quarter of South African girls are raped before turning 16. This has many roots: masculine entitlement (62 per cent of boys over 11 believe that forcing someone to have sex is not an act of violence), poverty, crammed settlements, unemployed and disenfranchised men, community acceptance -- and, for the few cases that are courageously reported to authorities, a dismal police response and lax sentencing.

This is a human catastrophe. But Luleki Sizwe and partners at Change.org have opened a small window of hope in the fight against it. If the whole world weighs in now, we could get justice for Millicent and national action to end 'corrective rape':

This is ultimately a battle with poverty, patriarchy, and homophobia. Ending the tide of rape will require bold leadership and concerted action to spearhead transformative change in South Africa and across the continent. President Zuma is a Zulu traditionalist, who has himself stood trial for rape. But he condemned the arrest of a gay couple in Malawi last year, and, after massive national and international civic pressure, South Africa finally approved a UN resolution opposing extra-judicial killing in relation to sexual orientation.

If enough of us join this global call for action, we could push Zuma to speak out, drive much-needed government action, and begin a national conversation that could fundamentally shift public attitudes toward rape and homophobia in South Africa. Sign on now and spread the word:

A case like Millicent's makes it easy to lose hope. But when citizens come together with one voice, we can succeed in shifting fundamentally unjust, but deeply ingrained practices and norms. Last year, in Uganda, we succeeded in building such a massive wave of public pressure that the government was forced to shelve legislation that would have sentenced gay Ugandans to death. And it was global pressure in support of bold national activists that pushed South African leaders to address the AIDS crisis that was engulfing their country. Let's join together now and speak out for a world where each and every human being can live without fear of abuse.

With hope and determination,

Alice, Ricken, Maria Paz, David and the rest of the Avaaz team