

For Immediate Media Release

Book Launch - Life Stories of South African Gay and Lesbian Youth

On June 11 Johannesburg-based organisation the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA) will be joined by Justice Edwin Cameron and other human rights advocates to launch a new publication that shares stories of gay and lesbian youth in South Africa, while promoting respect and tolerance in schools. In **Balancing Act: South African Gay and Lesbian Youth Speak Out**, twenty-one young South Africans from a wide range of social backgrounds speak candidly about their experiences, hopes and dreams. Specifically written to be used in schools, the book contains insightful and useful teaching notes relating to the area of Life Orientation.

The launch will be held from 16h00 on Saturday 11 June 2005 at the Old Fort (Temporary Exhibition Area 2), Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. The exhibition based on the book showcases a selection of extracts from 9 stories with photographs.

"We created this resource to help address the high levels of discrimination and victimization being faced by gay and lesbian youth in schools," says GALA director Ruth Morgan, "anecdotal evidence tells us that these high levels of abuse result in many youth leaving school before completion."

For many young people in South Africa, coming to terms with their sexual orientation can be a very painful experience. Although guaranteed as a freedom in the national constitution, lack of acceptance by family and society is often a reality. "Sometimes I feel sad and lonely, like my family doesn't love me. But I have to deal with the facts: it's not easy to accept that your child is gay. There are very few parents who would, because of the stigma," says 17 year-old Sandile.

The book explores the lives of gay youth in this country in a manner that challenges stereotypes and prejudices, and provides much needed information to young gay and lesbian people. The book not only focuses on the difficulties faced, but also the positive options and strategies adopted by well-adjusted young people – providing positive role models that readers can relate to as they begin to make their own life choices. It is hoped that the book will play an important role in an ongoing process of human rights-based sexuality education for young South Africans. Since the experiences described in **Balancing Act** are related to issues affecting all youth, whatever their orientation, the book is relevant to all young people growing up in this country. By producing a positive, life-affirming book and exhibition, GALA hopes to promote much-needed openness on issues of sexual orientation, in the interests of reducing homophobic prejudice.

The book launch is particularly timely as it is happening in celebration of Youth Day on June 16. Youth Day is a national holiday honouring young people who lost their lives in the struggle against Apartheid and Bantu Education. In choosing this time for a launch, we hope to remind people that discrimination, whether based on race, gender, or sexual orientation, has no place in our society.

Established in January 1997, the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa (GALA) is an independent project of the South African History Archive (SAHA) which forms part of the Historical Papers collection based at the William Cullen Library in the University of the Witwatersrand. GALA provides a permanent institutional home for the wide range of historical and archival material relating to gay and lesbian experience in South Africa. It aims to be a source of information to the public and to serve as a catalyst for generating other, previously silenced community histories and personal narratives.

The book was written by Karen Martin and Joanne Bloch, and published by New Africa Education. It is being translated in Xhosa and Afrikaans by the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa.

For more information about the book or launch event, contact:

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