



- For Immediate Media Release -

### **'Coming Out Again' - Life Stories to Celebrate Human Rights Day**

In celebration of Human Rights Day 21 March 2006, *Coming Out Again*, a theatrical production from the Johannesburg-based Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), will be touring with performances in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and Cape Town. The theatre project focuses on HIV/AIDS awareness in the gay and lesbian community, and raises issues about HIV in the Deaf community through the real-life stories of the actors. The production is fun and entertaining, while using a rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS. It tells the story of 7 individuals getting ready for Thuli's Pride Party. Among all the usual worries - what will I wear? will I meet someone? - are a few bigger ones - how, and when, will we talk about HIV. Come share the stories of these seven actors - three of being HIV positive, others as coping with positive family members, losing loved ones, and trying to stay negative.

#### **Performance Schedule**

21 March 2006 – 13:00 City Hall, Durban

22 March 2006 – 17:00 BAT Centre, Durban

23 March 2006 – 14:00 Kismet Hotel, 460 Longmarket Street, Pietermaritzburg

24 March 2006 – 17:00 JL Zwane Centre, Gugulethu

25 March 2006 – 14:00 On Broadway, 88 Shortmarket St., Cape Town

Each of the actors worked with the writer and director one-on-one, talking about their lives and experiences to come up with the storylines. Then over a period of six weeks, the directors workshopped the cast to develop and rehearse the final scripting. This project is part of GALA's HIV oral history and outreach project. (Anyone wishing to participate in an interview should contact GALA)

Celebrated since 1994, 21 March Human Rights Day remembers the 69 people who died in Sharpeville protesting against pass laws. It is a day set aside to celebrate and to remind all South Africans of their human rights. However, research shows that there is still widespread discrimination against the LGBTI community, with frequent verbal and physical assaults occurring. Though the national Constitution offers protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation, systemic bias within institutions, such as health services, education and the legal system, often perpetuate prejudice. This theatre production aims to help raise awareness about these rights, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS awareness and reducing stigma.

"The sad situation is that despite the horrific presence of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, LGBTIs have to a large extent been sidelined by the government's anti-AIDS campaigns," says *Coming Out Again* Director, Gerard Bester.

The production also aims to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and the rights of the Deaf community. Deaf actor John Meletse shares his experience through a Sign Language interpreter, and the performances are fully Sign Language interpreted. John explains that he aims to be a role model for the Deaf community, "...a lot of Deaf people out there don't know what HIV/AIDS is about. They don't even know that they can be involved in plays. Many Deaf people out there are suffering because of lack of information and understanding. They also don't have role models, a lot of hearing people do have role models; we don't. So I think this is a fantastic opportunity."

See also - [http://www.wits.ac.za/gala/culture\\_theatre.htm](http://www.wits.ac.za/gala/culture_theatre.htm)

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