



IDAHOBIT 2026: At the heart of democracy is the right of all to thrive

South Africa, as an active member of the international community, has a responsibility “to advance our constitutional values beyond our borders,” said President Cyril Ramaphosa at the 4th meeting of the ‘In Defence of Democracy’ initiative in Barcelona, Spain, on 18 April.

While there has been pushback against our Constitution *within our borders*, there is, arguably, still sufficient consensus that constitutional values are the backbone of our democracy. These include: the rule of law; an independent judiciary; protection of fundamental freedoms (such as association, speech and movement); equal opportunity and justice; political participation; accountability and transparency; and the protection of minorities. In summary, a true democracy ensures that freedom is not just a gift from government, but a protected right (as illustrated by the [South African Bill of Rights](#)).

What has this got to do with IDAHOBIT, the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, celebrated every year on 17 May? This year’s theme ‘At the heart of democracy’ is a reminder that truly democratic societies must be grounded in justice and freedom for everyone. And ‘everyone’ includes members of our LGBTQIA+ communities, who, along with everyone else who resides in South Africa, have the right not just to exist, but to thrive.

One aspect of thriving is being able to express and fulfil one’s highest and most actualised self, living out the potential in all of us to find love and work, live a decent and dignified life, and participate in community and political spaces. To thrive one must be valued from a young age, nurtured, protected, loved and celebrated.

As the Sexuality and Gender Division of PsySSA, we therefore call for ‘conversion practices’ (attempts to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender) to be outlawed, not only in South Africa, but in the rest of Africa too. With [Outright International](#), we have produced a [Toolkit for Mental Health Providers working with Survivors of Conversion Practices in Africa](#), based on research conducted by Outright. This research has shown the devastating effects of conversion practices, often causing lasting psychological, social, spiritual and physical harms, impeding thriving. Noteworthy is that these practices are often imposed on vulnerable young people.

If South Africa is to truly be a ‘defender of democracy’ beyond its borders, this must start at home. While existing law could assist survivors of conversion practices, it does not go far enough to prevent these practices and the harms they cause. Our president, if he started a process of banning conversion practices, would send a powerful message to the whole African continent, that constitutional values of equality, fairness, dignity and freedom are not just

words on paper, but vehicles for legal and social change. At the 'heart of democracy' is the freedom of all Africans to thrive, not just survive, the attempts to change, crush and distort their sexuality or gender. This IDAHOBIT celebration should be a call for activism which ends dehumanising conversion practices, once and for all.

Author

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