

Murder and Escalating Violence Against LGBTIQ+ People

By Jami Zulu

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The brutal killing of Justine Adams, a transgender woman, has sent shockwaves through communities in the Drakenstein area and has renewed urgent concerns about the safety and protection of transgender and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, asexual and inclusive (LGBTIQ+) persons in South Africa. Community members say Adams's death must not simply become another statistic. They are calling for urgent action from government, law-enforcement agencies and other stakeholders to address hate crimes, gender-based violence and violence targeting LGBTIQ+ people.

"Our lives are in danger," said Layla Williams, a transgender woman from Wellington in the Western Cape. She expressed deep sadness and concern following Adams' killing. "It is so sad that our lives are in so much danger. We should not have to live every day wondering whether we will become the next victim. Government must really do something about hate crimes and violence against transgender people. Justine deserved to live. Her life mattered."

"We want to live freely, safely and with dignity. We want to walk on the streets without fear. We want to be treated as human beings. Nobody should be murdered simply because they are transgender. Justine's death must be an eye-opener for the government," Williams concluded.

Another gay community member, who requested anonymity because of concerns for their personal safety, said the killing demonstrated the seriousness the violence against LGBTIQ+ people face without concrete consequence for the perpetrators. "We get hurt and brutally killed only because of who we are. Justine's death must be an eye-opener and a lesson for the government. South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, but yet our lives remain in danger."

Another community member added, "Rights on paper mean very little if people cannot safely exercise those rights in their communities. We need accountability, protection and justice. We need government to understand that this is an urgent crisis."

A second brutal killing raises further alarm. Concerns have intensified following the brutal killing of Simamkele Mfundisi, a 21-year-old openly gay man, who was allegedly killed with an axe on Saturday, 8 August 2026, in Mbekweni, Paarl. According to community information, there were initially serious concerns regarding efforts to obtain assistance and support from Mbekweni South African Police Services (SAPS). A murder case was eventually opened, and the matter is now under investigation.

At the time of this statement, no arrest had been reported, although police are understood to be following various investigative leads. The circumstances surrounding Mfundisi's death have contributed to an atmosphere of fear within the local LGBTIQ+ communities. Some community members have been reluctant to comment publicly, saying they fear retaliation and are concerned about their own safety. One community member said: "People are scared to speak because they do not know who could be listening or who might target them next. The silence should not be interpreted as acceptance; people are frightened."

Another community voice said, “When people are afraid to speak after a brutal killing, that tells you how serious the situation has become. Communities need to feel that the police and government will protect them.”

Drakenstein organisations call for urgent government intervention. The Drakenstein Trans & Gender Diverse Persons Movement has raised serious concerns about the apparent pattern of violence affecting members of the LGBTIQ+ community and is calling for an urgent response from the government. The organisation says violence against LGBTIQ+ people cannot be treated as isolated incidents when communities continue to report fear, discrimination, intimidation and violent attacks.

A representative of the organisation said, “We cannot continue burying our community members while holding meetings about human rights. We need action. We need accountability. We need effective policing, proper investigations and meaningful protection for LGBTIQ+ persons.” The organisation further called for perpetrators of violent crimes to be held accountable through due process, and for victims and their families to receive appropriate support. “Every life lost is a family devastated and a community traumatised. Justine Adams was somebody’s child, somebody’s friend and somebody who had a future. Simamkele Mfundisi was only 21 years old. These were human beings whose lives had value.”

“We refuse to become statistics.” A transgender community activist said, “We refuse to become statistics. We refuse to accept that being transgender or gay means that we must live with a permanent fear of violence. Our identities are not a crime. Our existence is not a threat to anybody.” Another community member said, “The Constitution promises equality and dignity. Those principles must be experienced in our townships, our streets, our homes and our communities—not only spoken about in parliament or written in policy documents.”

Community members are calling for authorities to ensure that the investigations into the deaths of Justine Adams and Simamkele Mfundisi receive appropriate attention and that all available leads are pursued. They are also calling for “stronger measures to prevent violence and hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ persons. Effective and sensitive policing when LGBTIQ+ victims or families seek assistance. Accountability where law-enforcement failures or negligence are established. Appropriate psychosocial support for victims, families and traumatised communities. Greater community education on LGBTIQ+ rights and protection. Government engagement with local LGBTIQ+ organisations and community leaders. Meaningful accountability for perpetrators of violence.”

The message from the community is clear: Justine Adams and Simamkele Mfundisi must not be forgotten. Their deaths have once again placed the safety of LGBTIQ+ persons under the spotlight and raised difficult questions about whether constitutional protections are being translated into real safety on the ground. “We are asking for more than condolences, we are asking for justice, we are asking for protection, we are asking for action and we are asking the government to act before another family has to bury another member of our community.”

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