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DIVERSITY

Let imam's murder strengthen the line against intolerance

As the world is recovering from the fusillades fired by the Trump administration against all that is beautiful about diversity and inclusiveness, we have experienced our own versions of intolerance.

Muhsin Hendricks, a gay imam of the People's Mosque in Wynberg, Cape Town, was shot dead when he was going to officiate over the marriage of a lesbian couple.

Just days before, thousands of Afrikaans speakers gathered at the US consulate in Johannesburg, demanding refugee status as a consequence of lobbying foreign capitals by



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right-wing organisations such as AfriForum.

The murder of the imam was greeted by shock and horror, with activist Zackie Achmat arguing "his executioners are not the majority of Muslims who care about every living being on earth, including every human person".

The Centre for Contempo-

rary Islam said it was "reeling from the ways in which some Muslims are condoning his assassination", bringing "into sharp focus the intense homophobia permeating the Muslim and other faith communities".

There is something deeply concerning about practitioners of a religion avowedly committed to tolerance who cannot exercise such a quality even to fellow adherents.

Sunnis routinely dismiss Shia as nonbelievers or accuse the mystical Sufis of engaging in un-Islamic practices, while many stripes of Islam banish family members marrying outside their faith or choosing a different lifestyle.

This demonising makes it easier for extremists to shoot, stab or behead.

Solidarity chair Flip Buys and his coterie have been at pains to distance themselves from the results of their unpatriotic lobbying, such as US President Donald Trump signing an executive order halting all aid to SA and offering refugee status to Afrikaners. Buys said: "We reaffirm today our commitment to the country and all its people."

However, the posters carried at the demonstration showed what supporters truly believe: not only did they thank Trump, they called for an end to legalised racism – seemingly different from the illegal racism

they seem to enjoy practising.

Muslim bigots and white Afrikaner racists must remember they are allowed to hold diverse views because of this rainbow nation's tolerance and its enlightened constitution. This was made possible by the decades-long struggle waged against apartheid – the embodiment of Christian nationalism and colonialism.

Writing in the Sunday Times, Barney Mthombothi wrote that chauvinists such as Trump behave the way they do because "Trump is opposed to the idea of SA. The notion that people of all races could work together to build a harmonious society offends his racist

sensibilities", and that "such an experiment should not be allowed to succeed".

The majority of South Africans who take pride in all our country stands for should find our collective backbone as we confront these demons at home and abroad. At home such monsters must not be allowed to cross the thin blue line of the law. More powerfully, we must express society's condemnation: their families and congregations must know that such behaviour is not just evil, illegal and unpatriotic, it is simply unacceptable.

Similarly, SA must strengthen the rainbow line against homophobes, racists and right

wingers around the world. We are once again occupying the moral high ground, as we did during the period of Mandela's presidency when our foreign policy was guided by our deep commitment to human rights.

Our actions at the International Court of Justice concerning the genocide in Gaza have been supported by many states around the world, holding up the candle of hope for a rules-based world order. Our commitment to the constitution is a source of hope for LGBTQI+ individuals and communities around the world.

Our commitment to redressing the legacies of apartheid provides succour to

hundreds of millions as they struggle to overcome the racist legacies of slavery and colonialism so that they can find a job, and their families can live in safety and with dignity.

We need to protect the advances made through diversity, equity and inclusion programmes as they focus on fostering a positive work culture where all employees feel accepted, respected and heard, ensuring equal access to opportunities, particularly for those who have been marginalised.

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