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The Traditional Healers Organisation

Dear Phepsile Maseko

I am in receipt of a submission by the THO in objection to the 'Mpumalanga Witchcraft Suppression Bill'.

I wish to offer the following comments on behalf of the South African Pagan Rights Alliance in this regard.

1. Definition of Witchcraft

The THO's proposed definition of Witchcraft is:

- (a) Any act or conduct, which causes or leads to the infliction of injury, illness, or even spiritual damage to another person through the use of ubuthi [1] or other destructive means;
- (b) Any act or conduct that leads to the death of another person through ukuthakatha [the practice of witchcrafts];
- (c) Any act or conduct which is perceived by the community as unnatural and capable of causing danger or damage to the person or property of another through some negative energy;
- (d) Any conduct or act which cannot be explained in western scientific terms but which is perceived or believed to exist and can be proved so to exist by those trained in African Science through diagnosis.

[1] 'ubuthi' is defined by the THO as: [(i) an object, act or substance used in the application of negative energy with an intention to kill or harm a person, (ii) the usage of any poisonous substance with an aim to kill or harm a person. (iii) any act that is evil in its nature and does not uphold the principles of humanity and nation building as enshrined in our constitution, and (iv) casting a spell on any person].

This Alliance finds the THO's definition of Witchcraft to constitute an infringement on the right of self-defined Witches to freedom of belief and religion.

The THO's definition defines Witchcraft as causing or leading to "the infliction of injury, illness, spiritual damage and death". The Alliance would argue that this definition prejudices Witchcraft and persons who practice Witchcraft as automatically evil. The THO's definition undermines the dignity and security of self-defined Witches by characterising Witches as a threat to the well-being of communities within which Witches live and work.

We hold that the THO's definition will serve to justify future acts of revenge against alleged and actual Witches on mere suspicion of bewitchment, and to this extent, we would argue that the THO's definition constitutes hate-speech and implicit incitement to violence against anyone suspected of practicing Witchcraft.

Self-defined Witches - practitioners of Witchcraft - will never accept nor condone such a discriminatory and offensive definition of Witchcraft.

The Alliance defines Witchcraft as: 'a religio-magical occupation that employs the use of sympathetic magic, ritual, herbalism and divination'.

I wish to draw your attention to the following motivation in support of the Alliance's preferred definition of Witchcraft as stated above.

The South African religious community to which I refer defines its spiritual occupation as Witchcraft and its adherents define themselves as Witches. It should be noted that most, but not all members of this Alliance define themselves as Witches or as members of 'the Wicca'. The English word 'witch' is derived from the medieval English word 'wicche'. The medieval word in turn derives from the Anglo-Saxon words 'wicca' (meaning a male Witch) and 'wicce' (meaning a female Witch).

The Anglo-Saxon derivation of the word 'witch' places this discussion of witchcraft within a pagan / heathen context. Witchcraft is described as an occupation closely associated with divination and the practice of natural magic, and its practices are understood as something sacred and spiritual by those who practice them. It is in this context that modern Pagan Witches use the terms Witch and Witchcraft.

Witchcraft is an ancient magical system that employs the use of divination, sympathetic magic and ritual practices, but does not necessarily confine itself to the worship of deity, nor to any specific religion or culture. Contemporary Pagan Witches define their religio-spiritual practices as a craft. Modern Witches ply their craft as herbalists, diviners and magic workers.

As 'Wicca', Witchcraft has evolved into a modern Pagan mystery religion. Wicca is an initiatory, polytheistic (with exceptions), Pagan mystery religion inspired by various pre- and post-Christian western European beliefs and spiritual practices. Wicca was popularised in England in the 1950's by Gerald Gardner. An initiate of 'the Wicca' is one who traces his or her initiatory lineage back to Gerald Gardner or his initiates.

Not all Witches define themselves as 'Wicca'. Contrived disassociation of the term 'Wicca' from 'Witch' in order to support a cultural and religious world-view of good (the Wicca) versus evil (the Witch) is grossly misleading. The Wicca are (with exception), by self-definition, Witches.

Here are a few alternative definitions of Witchcraft:

the art of sorcery - Note: The word 'sorcerer' derives from the Middle English 'sorser' and originates from the Old French 'sorcier'. A sorceress is defined as a woman who practices magic and divination.
wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

The term witchcraft (and witch) is a controversial one with a complicated history. Used in entirely different contexts, and within entirely different cultural references, it can take on distinct and often contradictory meanings. Each culture has its own particular body of concepts dealing with magic, religion, benevolent and harmful spirits, and ritual; and these ideas do not find obvious equivalents in other cultures.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft

A magical religion with many diverse traditions derived from various cultural sources around which covens and individual practitioners base their practices.
www.geocities.com/sorchagriannon/terminology.htm

The practice of spells and magick, often involving the worship of many deities or a supreme God and/or Goddess.
www.spiritonline.com/dictionary/w.html

1. A way of life, or practice that involves magic, or sorcery, or worship of the earth itself. It is perceived as both good and bad by different cultures in society. 2. Wicca
www.csgr.us/terminology.html

the power or practices of witches.
towerwebproductions.com/alt-lib/occult/definitions.shtml

The craft or workings of the Witch, i.e. magic(k) and healing making use of personal power in combination with the energies within candles, stones, herbs, and other natural items and combined with correspondences.
www.witchdom.com/LearnCraft/Glossaries/gloss%20w.htm

The Alliance is aware of the urgent need to engage in further debate and discussion on this very important subject and looks forward to further engagement with the THO in this respect in order to prevent the enactment of any legislation which would in any way criminalise South African citizens who define themselves as Witches on the grounds of cultural or religious prejudice, or as the result of automatic inference of criminality to practitioners of Witchcraft in South Africa.

Yours Sincerely
Mr. Damon Leff
Convenor: South African Pagan Rights Alliance