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Pagan religious marriage officers

In February this year the Department of Home Affairs approved an application submitted by the South African Pagan Rights Alliance's (SAPRA) for designation as a religious organisation in terms of and in accordance with section 5 (1) and (2) of the Civil Union Act (Act 17 of 2006).

According to section 5 of the Civil Union Act SAPRA may now solemnise marriages and civil partnerships. This is the first time in history that Pagans will be permitted the opportunity of becoming religious marriage officers. SAPRA is the first Pagan organisation to be granted this designation.

Prior to the advent of the Civil Union Act in December 2006 the Marriage Act (Act 25 of 1961) prohibited religious marriages conducted according to Pagan religious rites of custom and tradition by stating that religious marriages may only be conducted *"according to Christian, Jewish or Mohammedan rites or the rites of any Indian religion"*.

In SAPRA's public comment on the passage of the Civil Union Bill in 2006 the Alliance supported same-sex unions and marriages and encouraged the Home Affairs Parliamentary Portfolio committee to pass the Civil Union Bill in order to give effect not only to the constitutional court ruling against the Marriage Act, but to the constitutional guarantee of equality to all South Africans irrespective of religion or sexual preference.

South African Pagans are humbled by the realisation that this designation milestone will, in the true course of time and fate, become a part of our collective Pagan history as a religion and as a people. We are the generation blessed by the Fates and a new political dispensation to undertake the rebirth and renewal of an ancient faith of many faces. Without the revolution of conscience that brought an end to the dark days of enforced racial and religious segregation, without the creation of a constitution and bill of rights founded on the principles of equality and human dignity, none of this would ever have been possible. We owe our liberty, as a people and as a religion, to those who sacrificed their lives that others may be set free. The designation of Pagan religious marriage officers is one more step in the right direction for our fledgeling democracy. We hope that other minority religions are afforded equal opportunity to fully participate in the religious freedoms enjoyed by other larger and more prominent religions such as Christianity.

SAPRA has submitted applications for 13 Pagans of good standing within the national Pagan religious community seeking to become religious marriage officers in terms of the provisions of the Civil Union Act. The nominated religious marriage officers will be required to write an examination set by Home Affairs and will be given six months in which to write this examination from the date of registration (12 February). If they pass the examination they will be registered under the Civil Union Act as religious marriage officers and will be permitted to solemnise both marriages and civil unions irrespective of whether engaged couples are heterosexual or of the same sex.