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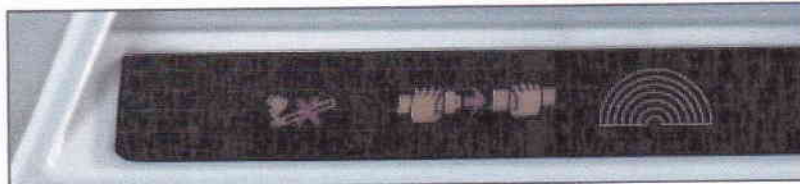
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#### GayWired.com Article



### Same-Sex Marriage Now Legal in South Africa

12.04.06

Same-sex marriage is now legal in South Africa, thanks to the Civil Union Act, which was recently signed by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, South Africa's Deputy President. Mukoni Ratshitanga, a presidential spokesperson, announced the signing on Thursday, November 30.

The AFP news service reports that "the government was forced to legislate on same-sex marriage after the country's highest court, [the Constitutional Court], ruled last December that existing laws denied gays and lesbians the same constitutional rights as heterosexual couples and

gave it a year to change that."

The signing of the Civil Union Act not only makes South Africa the first African country to allow same-sex marriage, but also gives South African gays the same rights as straight people. Gay activists in the country are very pleased about the signing.

In a statement, the African gay and lesbian group Triangle Project said that "this is probably the most significant step for South Africa's gay and lesbian community, and is a giant development for human rights around the world."

The BBC reports that "the law was approved by MPs two weeks ago, despite objections from religious groups and traditional leaders." (Africa is still, on the whole, an anti-gay continent.)

African Christian Democratic Party leader Kenneth Meshoe told the AFP that most South Africans disagree with the signing. "What has happened has proved that the wishes of the majority of South Africans are not taken seriously by the majority party," he said.

While the parliamentary debate was taking place, the BBC notes, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, Home Affairs Minister, said that "in breaking with our past... we need to fight and resist all forms of discrimination and prejudice, including homophobia."

Shortly after the Civil Union Act was signed, Vernon Gibbs and Tony Halls became South Africa's first legally married gay couple. The ceremony took place on December 1st, which is also World AIDS Day. "This marriage ... is for all HIV/Aids sufferers and gay people who have experienced discrimination," Vernon Halls-Gibbs told the BBC.



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