

**WORLD** news



**AUSTRALIA**

Seventy gay men and lesbians who attended Mass wearing rainbow sashes at Melbourne's Roman Catholic Cathedral were refused communion Nov. 29.

Priests withheld wafers from those who made it to the front of the church and blocked others from getting to the front.

The protesters plan to continue their challenge to the church's ban on giving the Eucharist to noncelibate gay men and lesbians.

"The official line is homosexuality is ordained to be intrinsically, morally evil, which is a polite way of saying we're disgusting perverts, and that leads to a culture of fear and loathing and to significant levels of suicide among young gay people," said protester David Barker.

**GERMANY**

On Nov. 29, the residents of Quellendorf voted 482-235 to oust Mayor Norbert Linder, who has stated publicly he plans to undergo gender reassignment surgery.

Linder, 40, was elected to a seven-year term in 1996 but shocked many villagers this past summer when he began wearing women's clothes and calling himself Michaela. He recently started taking female hormones and plans to undergo gender reassignment surgery in the year 2000.

According to a Nov. 29 Associated Press report, transsexuals from Germany and France converged on the village of 1,048 inhabitants right before the vote to show support for the mayor, who appealed for tolerance.

"I think society as a whole has some catching up to do," Linder told reporters.

The vote was denounced by Linder's party, the Democratic Socialists, as "degrading discrimination."

**PHILIPPINES**

A 74-year-old gay man in Manila is seeking reparations from Japan for being kept as a sex slave during World War II.

Walter Dempster says he and five of his drag-queen friends were kidnapped, taken to a garrison in suburban Manila, and forced to service Japanese soldiers for several months.

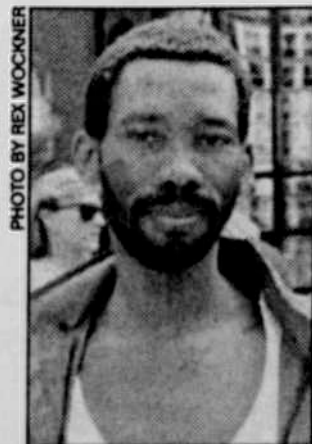
"We were mauled, punched, kicked, slapped, pinched with cigarette butts and hit with bayonets until we bled," Dempster told the *Manila Standard* newspaper. "Then we were pushed on the table face down where a long queue of Japanese soldiers waited their turn."

Dempster is receiving assistance in his court case from a Manila city councilor.

**SOUTH AFRICA**

Simon Tseko Nkoli, South Africa's most well-known gay activist, died Nov. 30 of complications related to AIDS. Nkoli, 41, died at Johannesburg General Hospital.

In a joint statement, the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand and the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality—both of which Nkoli helped



Simon Tseko Nkoli

found—said: "We mourn the loss of an important anti-apartheid activist, gay and lesbian rights activist and HIV/AIDS activist. Simon was a courageous person who dared to declare his sexual orientation and his HIV status at a time when few were prepared to do so. Through these acts he defied the notion that being gay is un-African."

"As a founding member of both GLOW and the NCGLE, Simon played an important role in ensuring that equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons has been entrenched in the South African constitution as an unalienable right. Simon played an important role in putting lesbian and gay issues on the agenda of the African National Congress."

At the time of his death, Nkoli was president of GLOW, a board member of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, a member of the 1999 ILGA World Conference Organising Committee and a member of the African National Congress.

Nkoli was jailed for treason for three years in the mid-1980s. In a 1989 press interview, he explained: "It was because of my previous political involvement. I was involved in anti-apartheid organizations and demonstrated against unjust laws such as detention without trial, inferior education and the increase of rent."

Nkoli is survived by his partner, Roderick Sharp.

**WESTERN EUROPE**

AIDS-related deaths have dropped 84 percent in Western Europe since 1995, according to a new study published in *The Lancet*.

From March to September 1995, 25 percent of all AIDS patients died, whereas 4 percent died during the same period in 1998.

Researchers credit the new combination antiviral drug treatments.

The study tracked 4,270 HIV patients at 50 medical facilities across the continent.

**ZIMBABWE**

Former president Canaan Banana was found guilty Nov. 26 of sodomy and sexual assault against 11 of his bodyguards, cooks and gardeners between 1980 and 1987.

Just before the verdict was announced, Banana fled to neighboring Botswana and requested political asylum. He had been free on bail. He faces a prison sentence of up to 22 years.

During his trial, Banana, 62, said the charges were fabricated to destroy his character following rumors he was planning a political comeback that would challenge the rule of President Robert Mugabe.

Banana was brought to trial after a policeman shot to death a colleague who had taunted him as "Banana's wife." The policeman, Jefta Dube, testified that Banana forced him into a three-year sexual relationship from 1984 through 1986. In the first assault, Dube said, he was drugged and woke up naked with a smiling Banana saying, "We helped ourselves." When Dube finally ended the relationship, Banana had him jailed, he said.

Other victims described a scenario in which Banana would ask them to play cards, offer them a drink, put on music, insist on teaching them to dance, then kiss and fondle them while dancing.

Following the verdict, Keith Goddard, director of the group Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, commented: "I can't see the logic in asking for political asylum from a gay-sex conviction in Botswana, which is almost as homophobic as Zimbabwe. But Banana's case has always been more about abuse of power and rape than about consensual sex."

■ Compiled REX WOCKNER



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