

## **2015 Award Recipient**

**Martha Tholanah**

**Zimbabwean Feminist Openly Living with HIV Wins 2015 David Kato Vision & Voice Award**



Martha Tholanah is a mother of two girls, grandmother of one, proud feminist, and a person openly living with HIV. She has risked her life to support marginalized communities, and her activism is a powerful example of a straight ally standing in solidarity with LGBT people despite threats to her own safety and security.

Martha has shown courage, commitment and strategic leadership when bringing prescient issues to the forefront of major dialogues. She maintains dedication to movement-building as well as integrity to the most marginalized communities - often risking incarceration and legal ramifications for her activism. Her efforts demonstrate a powerful belief in collaboration, connection, and inclusion to create effective change.

As a child, Martha endured low self-esteem and ridicule from her peers about her appearance. Later she experienced violence at the hands of fighters during the Zimbabwe War of Liberation. Martha struggled with the aftermath of this violence and traumatic abuse, but these experiences came to inform and embolden her in a fight against injustice as an adult.

As a trained family therapy counselor qualified in medical rehabilitation, she established and headed health programs for Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) and the Network of Zimbabwean Positive Women (NZPW+). She currently serves as Chairperson of the Board for GALZ, an organization that has been a long time partner and contributor to the Global Forum on MSM & HIV's (MSMGF) work.

In Zimbabwe, human rights activists often face interference by governmental authorities, and Martha has continued her work despite numerous instances of government threats. Undeterred by government interference and attacks, police surveillance, and campaigns to arrest LGBTI activists, Martha has always pushed forward unafraid, achieving powerful advocacy victories and working to ensure the safety of her fellow activists. In a politically and socially tense climate such as Zimbabwe, it is grassroots and non-governmental organizations such as GALZ and NZPW+ that spearhead the fight for an effective HIV response.

Martha has bravely stood in solidarity with the LGBTI community of Zimbabwe and she has represented GALZ in legally challenging state-sanctioned homophobia and violence. She has appeared in court for her activism multiple times and is currently facing two charges with the Zimbabwe Government linked to her involvement with LGBTI activism. Despite these challenges she remains deeply committed to her work.

As a proud feminist fighting to eliminate sexism in Zimbabwe, she also works to reclaim women's voices in a male-dominated political and social landscape. Injustices such as coerced sterilizations and other reproductive rights violations of HIV positive women make her feminist work all the more crucial.

She has not only worked with NZPW+ but also serves as Chairperson for the Board of the International Community of Women Living with HIV / AIDS (ICW), Women and AIDS Support Network (WASN), Women's Action Group (WAG), and many other organizations. She continues to support LBT women as well as parents of LGBTI people in dealing with homophobia.

Her focus on movement-building and strengthening access to health services for marginalized populations has led her to successfully ensuring that the National AIDS Council includes LGBTI people in their programming. Martha has also successfully ensured that programs for measuring stigma in Zimbabwe incorporate LGBTI people.

Her work with GALZ and NZPW+ has inspired other HIV positive women and LGBT people to continue their advocacy work through adversity, as well as inspiring non-LGBTI people to ally themselves with GALZ. By bridging these connections, she is able to strengthen the HIV response in Zimbabwe and connect GALZ with major organizations that can provide a platform in addressing these issues.

Winning the David Kato Vision & Voice Award brings international attention to the work so dear to Martha's heart. By acknowledging the importance of her struggle toward the health and human rights of all people, she hopes the David Kato Vision & Voice Award will inspire and encourage others to join the movement against discrimination in Zimbabwe and around the world.

Through the David Kato Vision & Voice Award, we honor Martha's commitment to the struggle for equality, as she and countless other activists around the world continue working to secure the rights of marginalized communities for generations to come.

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*The David Kato Vision & Voice Award (DKVVA) recognizes and supports the work of leaders who strive to uphold the human rights and dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people around the world. The DKVVA provides winners with a \$10,000 grant to support their work and a global media platform to increase visibility of these important issues worldwide. The DKVVA is supported by a Secretariat based at the Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF). MSMGF advocates for equitable access to effective HIV prevention, care, treatment, and support services tailored to the needs of gay men and other MSM, including gay men and MSM living with HIV, while promoting their health and human rights worldwide. More information about the DKVVA can be found at [www.visionandvoiceaward.com](http://www.visionandvoiceaward.com), and more information about MSMGF can be found at [www.msmgf.org](http://www.msmgf.org).*