

CHRISTIANS FIGHT RELIGIOUS FOOD LABELS

Those were the recent press headlines reporting on the court action brought against the government by an organisation claiming to be a coalition of Christian groups who approached the courts asking that it;

1. Declare the regulations that allow for religious marks of halaal, kosher etc that excludes Christianity as unconstitutional.
2. If these products carry religious signs on its packaging then similar food products without these signs must also be made available to the consumer.
3. Asks the government to introduce measures ensuring that costs associated with these signs are not directly or indirectly passed on to consumers of other religious groups who are excluded on the labelling.

SANHA regards this action as ill-conceived, flawed, ludicrous in its demands, unpatriotic and malicious.

The credibility of this group, their representation and standing in the Christian community needs to be established. The recent outcry on the hot cross buns turned out to be the work of a small fringe group as opposed to mainstream Christianity where the likes of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference distanced themselves from this kind of extremism. All Christians should not be tarred with the same brush.

Dietary laws apparently are not a fundamental article of the Christian faith. For example in the Old Testament in Leviticus 11: 8 of the swine it is said **"of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcass shall ye not touch;.."**, yet today it

is consumed Christian. In the New Testament it is stated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 14:16-18: **"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."**

Therefore what we see here is religious apartheid, where this Christian group would have no objection on missionary work preaching brotherhood of man, love thy neighbour, and Jesus as the Saviour, while blatantly showing intolerance and bigotry on religious labelling. We do not believe that mainstream Christianity supports this.

Manufacturers rely on various factors in ensuring their product has a competitive edge to increase their market share. These include patented technologies, unique features, better pricing, packaging and/or service and product enhancements that add value. Amongst these tried and tested practices is endorsement by organisations and services such as a medical body, an industry guild or association, quality standards e.g. ISO, Bureau of Standards, Good Food Society, Proudly South African, Heart Foundation, Vegetarian society, Shuddah Hindu, Kosher and of course, the Halaal certification marks. A Halaal mark signifies that the product was produced in a Halaal compliant facility which is free from Pork, alcohol and non-Halaal materials using only permitted ingredients and is an assurance to consumers that follow a Halaal lifestyle.

In our free market society and it stands to reason that these enhancements are for that competitive edge. No businessman will intentionally pay a price to have such an

enhancement if there was no demand or to deliberately aggravate his customers. Therefore the process is a self regulating one in that customers vote with their feet and will take their business elsewhere if it does not satisfy their own criteria of price, presentation, performance, religious assurance etc.

The challenge on constitutional grounds will be a double edged sword as it is also the constitutional right of religious and other interest groups to have their rights of religion and association upheld. And what about the rights of the trader to be able to freely market his products on a willing seller, willing buyer basis without being impeded by a fringe group wanting to forcibly impose its views unjustly on others?

Even the call by this misguided group for government intervention on duplicating products and having measures in place to control costs is naive, ludicrous to the extreme and impractical to implement. We regard any action that oxygenate the embers of the flame of hatred between South Africans of all races, colours, religious persuasions as unpatriotic and a betrayal of the struggle which included immense contributions by religious leaders to establish a just and democratic society.

SANHA extends an invitation in an Islamic spirit of tolerance and brotherhood to this unknown coalition group to meet with us so that we may enlighten them on the beauty of a Halaal lifestyle, and demonstrate the folly of their action which leads to bigotry and intolerance.