

# Woolworths embroiled in social media storm over job ad

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Upmarket retailer Woolworths on Tuesday found itself in a social media storm with calls for boycotts from, among others, Afrikaans singer Steve Hofmeyr who tweeted "Gonna be hard, but goodbye Woolies."



The debacle started with a claim made on a blog on Sunday evening by Justin Harrison, who said Woolworths "blatantly" posted advertisements on its career site that were "exclusive of whites".

"This unleashed a flurry of both mild criticism and strong support for the JSE listed retailer on social media sites Twitter and Facebook.

"I have launched a full scale campaign against Woolworths SA in a bid to get a public apology from them, as well as getting them to revert their policies to be fully inclusive and equal to all South Africans, failing which I am calling all South Africans that oppose racism to boycott Woolworths.

"After all, I find it only fair that if they expect whites to spend money in their stores, they should provide equal opportunities to all, including whites," Harrison said.

On his blog, Harrison describes himself as a "South African internet entrepreneurial pioneer."

Harrison's blog posting prompted the Pro-Afrikaans Action Group (Praag) to call for a blanket boycott of Woolworths.

## Woolies classified as a 'hate group'

Praag leader Dan Roodt said that during an "emergency meeting" of Praag's human rights committee, Woolworths had been classified as a hate group.

"We will contact the Council of Europe and the European Human Rights Commission, requesting them to ban employees of

Woolworths from obtaining Schengen visas. In this respect, Simon Susman and his fellow managers must be treated the same way as Robert Mugabe and his henchmen," Roodt said.

Susman is no longer the CEO of Woolworths; he is the group's chairman. Ian Moir is the CEO of Woolworths.

Denver Berman-Jacob, a white employee at Woolworths tweeted that the accusations were baseless and without merit. "I think I should know, I work here."

Woolworths said that like all South African companies, it had a role to play in transformation.

## **SAA brought back to earth**

"For this reason, some positions, where there is under-representation are designated groups. The designated groups are Africans, Coloureds, Indians, women and people with disability. It is not true that all positions are reserved for these designated groups - Woolworth's employs people of all races," the company said.

The Employment Equity Act expects all South African companies with more than 50 employees, to plan their workforce by race, gender and disability.

The Woolworths internet debacle follows a similar incident in August when South African Airways (SAA) was accused of implementing a system where cadet pilot training course applications from white men were no longer being accepted.

According to SAA, 85% of its pilots are white, of which 7.6% are white females.

"This means that only 15% of SAA pilots are black, i.e. Africans, Coloureds and Indians," the airline said in a statement in August.

SAA has since lifted the ban.

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