

EXTERNAL

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EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION OF NURSE/COMMUNITY LEADER

**Jeanette Mahongo
SOUTH AFRICA**

Jeanette Mahongo, a nursing sister and community leader, was asleep in bed on 21 October 1992 when her home in Seymour, Ciskei, was attacked with petrol-bombs. She died in hospital soon afterwards from her injuries. The authorities have so far failed to investigate the attack in a serious manner and bring to justice those responsible for her murder. It appears that the Ciskei security police were directly involved in the murder, and that Sister Mahongo was the victim of an extrajudicial execution.

The small, isolated town of Seymour, in the nominally independent "homeland" of Ciskei, is home to a community with high unemployment and few basic amenities. Sister Mahongo, who was aged in her 50s with several children, was a nursing sister at the local health clinic. In addition she was chairperson or "mayoress" of the town council, a leader in the Methodist Church local women's group, and active in the community residents' association. She had worked hard over a period of time to attract development funds to Seymour in order to improve basic services for the community.

On the evening of 21 October 1992 a committee meeting to discuss development issues, with a guest from an international development organization, took place at Sister Mahongo's home. At about 9.00 pm, well after all the participants had left, she went to bed. At about 10 pm, other occupants of the house heard a loud bang, followed by screams. They rushed to Sister Mahongo's bedroom and found her bed and clothing on fire. A petrol-bomb had been thrown through the window-panes onto her bed, which was next to the window. A second petrol-bomb was thrown into another bedroom where her children and a woman companion were sleeping, but they escaped uninjured. Those in the house struggled to put out the flames. Neighbours rushed to help with buckets of water, but were driven back by automatic gunfire aimed at them from the direction of the nearby police station. No-one was injured in the shooting, and some managed to reach the house by another route. Sister Mahongo was taken to the intensive care unit at Cecilia Makiwane hospital, Mdantsane, where she died from her injuries.

Immediately after the attack an eye-witness saw two men running from the house to a white Toyota Corolla car waiting 20-30 metres away. The two jumped into the car and it sped off, past the local police station and away from Seymour. The car had a Port Elizabeth number-plate. Earlier on the day of the attack Seymour residents saw men they identified as security police officers from Alice in this same vehicle. Alice is some 50 minutes' drive from Seymour.

Although the small police station in Seymour is only a few minutes' walk from Sister Mahongo's house, the police did not come to the family's help during or after the petrol-bomb

attack. Instead, according to eye-witnesses who spoke with Amnesty International representatives visiting Seymour in January 1993, two local police officers were involved in shooting at people who ran to help douse the flames. The shots apparently came from houses adjoining the police station which, according to Seymour residents, accommodate policemen and their families.

Legal representatives for the Seymour community handed in details of Sister Mahongo's murder, including allegations of security police complicity, to the Ciskei police and the Ciskei Attorney General. In February 1993 two Ciskei police officers met one witness to hear his evidence. Nevertheless the police have not so far reported to lawyers acting on behalf of Sister Mahongo's family the results of any investigations. No other efforts to investigate the case have been visible to the community, and the police officers allegedly implicated in Sister Mahongo's murder have not been arrested or suspended from duty.

Sister Mahongo and other community leaders sympathetic to the policies of the African National Congress (ANC) were appointed to the Seymour town council following a March 1990 coup in which Brigadier Gqozo seized power in the Ciskei "homeland". At that time Brigadier Gqozo's policies were largely sympathetic to those of the ANC, which had been unbanned by the Pretoria government in February 1990. However, from late 1990 Brigadier Gqozo's administration became dominated by South African Defence Force Military Intelligence officers. They appear to have been instrumental in encouraging policies hostile to the ANC, which is widely supported in Ciskei and the Eastern Cape generally. The Seymour community has been solidly ANC-supporting for a long time.

Sister Mahongo had been detained without charge for 2-3 weeks in late 1991 under state of emergency regulations then in force in the Ciskei "homeland". She was also pressured by Ciskei officials to stop her efforts to obtain development funds for the community. Other community activists have also fallen victim to detention. Since Sister Mahongo's murder the Ciskei authorities have been engaged in a determined attempt to remove the remaining ANC-aligned appointees from the town council. Two have resigned and the remaining three currently face criminal charges which appear unfounded and appear to be primarily intended as a form of harassment.

Seymour residents and others have requested the South African Police (SAP) to investigate this case, fearing that the Ciskei Police are too implicated to be able to investigate it independently. However the South African Police have said that Ciskei matters are outside their jurisdiction and they therefore cannot intervene. Moreover the South African government has restricted the terms of reference of the Goldstone Commission¹, making it difficult for their investigators to investigate human rights violations within the borders of Ciskei.

As a nominally independent "homeland", Ciskei has a head of state (Chairman of the Council of State) and government departments responsible for running the "homeland's" day-to-day affairs. However, officials seconded from Pretoria and from the SAP and SADF hold key positions in various Ciskei government departments. No country other than South Africa regards the "homeland" as independent. Amnesty International considers the South African Government in Pretoria to be ultimately responsible for events in Ciskei. In particular the South African Police, as the national police force, have a responsibility to provide protection for and investigate cases of all South African citizens, irrespective of whether or not they live within Ciskei Police jurisdiction.

¹The Commission of Inquiry regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation, chaired by Mr Justice Goldstone

Local community leaders have expressed concern that so long as no steps are taken against the officers implicated in the attack, potential witnesses to the incident are at risk.

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Research Department - Africa
Date: 12 May 1993

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Jeanette Mahongo - Extrajudicial execution
SOUTH AFRICA**

Keywords

Theme: Extrajudicial execution

Profession/association: Nursing sister

Summary

Please see the attached details concerning Jeanette Mahongo, a nursing sister who died on 21 October 1992 after her home in the nominally independent "homeland" of Ciskei was firebombed. There is evidence that the Ciskei security police were directly involved in her death.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the South African officials whose addresses are given below, including officials in Ciskei. Letters should

- express concern at the killing of Sister Jeanette Mahongo who died as a result of a petrol bomb attack on her home in Seymour, Ciskei on 21 October 1992, and state your deep concern that officers of the Ciskei police appear to have been implicated in her killing
- note that the men who attacked her house were seen fleeing from the scene in a vehicle bearing Port Elizabeth number plates which Seymour residents had seen earlier in the day occupied by men whom they identified as members of the Alice security police
- express your deep disquiet that, according to witnesses, police officers in the vicinity of Seymour police station used automatic gunfire to prevent neighbours from coming to Jeanette Mahongo's aid
- noting that Jeanette Mahongo was chairperson of the town council and well-known locally for her efforts to improve basic facilities available to the community; express your concern that her leading role within the community and her sympathies towards the ANC appear to have been the reasons for this deliberately targeted killing

■ urging that every possible step is taken to ensure that Sister Jeanette Mahongo's murder is the subject of a properly independent investigation, the findings of which should be made public at the earliest possible stage

[■ In letters to Pretoria, please urge that fully independent investigators are appointed to investigate the murder without delay, given grounds for believing Ciskei police officers to have been involved in the killing]

Addresses

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Mr H J Coetsee
Minister of Justice, and Minister of Defence
Department of Justice
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Minister of Law and Order
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Brigadier O J Gqozo
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