

UA 75/91

Death Threats

28 February 1991

SOUTH AFRICA: Mzamo MATHE, human rights activist

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of a human rights activist, Reverend Mzamo Phumzile Mathe, who has received repeated death threats. The most recent one was on 26 February 1991, when the caller said that he would be the next victim following the murder of a political activist, Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo, who was shot dead outside his home on 25 February. Reverend Mathe is the organizing secretary of the Northern Natal Council of Churches, Ladysmith, where he has been involved in assisting communities threatened with dispossession of their homes and land as a consequence of the continuing operation of apartheid laws. He has also been active in establishing "crisis committees" in Ladysmith and nearby towns to act as mediators in the violent political conflict which has been occurring in Natal province since 1987.

On 26 February Reverend Mathe received a telephone call in his office from a man who referred to the killing of Chief Maphumulo and said: "*You will be the next one*", before putting down the receiver. During 1990 he had received a number of threatening phone calls including threats of death. On 22 March 1990 he reported these calls to the police. He continued to receive these calls, however. The police told his lawyer on 30 July 1990 that the case was being "investigated in detail but that at present there are no likely suspects."

Amnesty International views such threats with concern because in other cases they have been followed by violent attacks against or the murder of the threatened person. It believes that the threats are intended to keep human rights activists from engaging in their lawful activities on behalf of the underprivileged and the victims of human rights violations. Amnesty International urges the South African government to take prompt and appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of human rights activists subjected to such threats, including Reverend Mathe, and to demonstrate its unequivocal opposition to such threats being made by bringing the perpetrators to justice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Natal province where Reverend Mathe is based, more than 4,000 people have been killed since 1987 during intense political conflict between members and supporters of the now unbanned African National Congress (ANC) and the conservative KwaZulu "homeland"-based organization, the Inkatha Freedom Party. The conflict has been exacerbated by the actions of the security forces, some sections of which have colluded with Inkatha members in violent attacks on communities and individuals, and by the failure of the authorities to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for killings and other abuses. Victims in this conflict have included people with high political profile, such as Chief Maphumulo, who was President of the ANC-aligned Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESAs) and initiated the establishment of an unofficial commission of inquiry into the Natal violence in 1989.

In early 1990 Chief Maphumulo's Table Mountain community outside Pietermaritzburg came under attack from armed Inkatha supporters, with the active support of the police, according to affidavits later accepted by a court. He had received many death threats and had survived several attempts on his life. At the end of 1990 CONTRALESAs members requested the government to investigate the source of a "hit-list" which included Chief Maphumulo's name. No response had been received from the government at the time of his assassination. Just after 8pm on 25 February 1991 he was fatally shot in the back of the head outside his Pietermaritzburg home. Another CONTRALESAs member, Chief Mcomdanza Mpungose, was shot dead three hours earlier on the same day in the

Waschbank area of northern Natal. The conflict has also claimed the lives of human rights activists, such as Reverend Victor Africander, chairperson of the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches, who was shot dead on 4 May 1990. His name, as well as that of other clergy, was on a hit-list later published. There are fears that individual assassinations rather than large-scale attacks on whole communities may represent the new trend in the conflict in Natal, in the aftermath of the January 1991 "peace talks" between ANC Deputy President Nelson Mandela and the KwaZulu "homeland" leader, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern for the safety of Reverend Mzamo Mathe following repeated anonymous telephone calls, most recently on 26 February 1991, threatening him with death;
- noting that when death threats have been made in the past, they have been followed by violent attacks against or the killing of the threatened person;
- asking that an immediate investigation be conducted into the threats to bring those responsible for them to justice;
- urging that all necessary steps be taken to ensure Reverend Mathe's safety.

APPEALS TO:

Mr F W De Klerk
State President
State President's Office
Private Bag X83
Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Telegrams: President De Klerk, Pretoria, South Africa
Telexes: 321695 SPLIB SA, 321890 PRES SA or 322158 PRES SA
Faxes: +27 12 323 3982

Mr A J Vlok
Minister of Law and Order
Private Bag X463
Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Telegrams: Minister Law/Order, Pretoria, South Africa
Telexes: 321353 HABS SA or 321358 HABS SA
Faxes: +27 12 322 2559

Lt-Gen J van der Merwe
Commissioner of Police
Police Headquarters
Private Bag X94
Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Telegrams: Police Commissioner Van de Merwe, Pretoria, South Africa
Telexes: 3-20772 SAPQM SA; 3-20838 SAPOB SA
Faxes: + 27 12 323 2033

Maj-Gen J C van Niekerk
Regional Commissioner of Police
Natal E Region
P O Box 391
Durban 4000, South Africa

Telegrams: Natal Regional Police Commissioner, Durban, South Africa

COPIES to one or more of the following:

- The Editor, The Natal Witness, Box 1634 Durban 4000, South Africa
- The Editor, The New African, Suite 206 Dinvir Centre, 123 Field Street, Durban 4001,

South Africa

- The Northern Natal Regional Council of Churches, P O Box 190 Ladysmith, South Africa
- Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), PO Box 2338, Pietermaritzburg 3200
- The Black Sash Repression Monitoring Group, Ecumenical Centre, 20 St Andrews St., Durban 4001

and to diplomatic representatives of South Africa in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 April 1991.