

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER'S LIFE IN DANGER

Nomsa Sizani, a human rights defender and former General Secretary of the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), is facing imminent threats to her life. The threats followed her allegedly questioning government officials who were in the community on 17 March, to speak about a development taking place there. The threats began the next day and have escalated since 23 March, leading to her going into hiding, in fear for her life. Her rights to life, safety and security are under attack and must be seen against a backdrop of a greater pattern of harassment, intimidation, threats, attacks and killings of AbM members and leaders. The South African authorities must promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate the threats made against Nomsa Sizani's life and take all necessary measures to ensure her protection.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President Cyril Ramaphosa

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South Africa

Email: president@presidency.gov.za

Copies to: presidentrsa@presidency.gov.za

Dear President Ramaphosa,

*I wish to bring to your attention the case of **Nomsa Sizani**, a single mother of four surviving children from eKukhanyeni, Marianhill in South Africa's North-Eastern province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Nomsa Sizani is a human rights defender and leader within the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement (AbM), a grassroots movement founded in 2005. She is facing imminent threats to her life following her questioning officials who were in her community to speak about developments taking place there on 17 March. She received a threatening phone call on 18 March, saying "if you don't shut that mouth, we will shut it for you". Threats against her have escalated since 23 March. On 26 March, she received a text message which said: "We hope that Zikode [referring to AbM president Sibusiso Zikode] and Abahlali will be able to protect you from that big mouth of yours". On 31 March, three men arrived at her home looking for her. She has now been forced into hiding.*

The threats against Nomsa Sizani must be seen against the backdrop of a greater pattern of harassment, intimidation, threats and killings of AbM members and leaders, which AbM count at 25 over their 18-year existence. One of these killings includes Nomsa Sizani's son, Samuel Hloele, who was allegedly shot by the eThekweni Anti-Land Invasion Unit according to AbM reports. Leaders of the movement have alleged that the targeted killings are a direct response to the movement challenging the status quo of the communities in which they reside and operate by speaking out against allegations of corruption at the local government level and organising themselves independently outside of party politics.

I know you are aware of the situation AbM is facing, having recently created a task team in KZN to investigate the killings of AbM members.

I therefore call on you and your government to take concrete and effective measures to promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate the death threats against Nomsa Sizani and to ensure her safety and security. Anyone suspected to be responsible for the threats should be identified and brought to justice in a fair trial. I also urge you and your government to protect and ensure respect for the human rights of human rights defender and to initiate a process to develop legislation for the effective protection of the human rights of human rights defenders in South Africa.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nomsa Sizani is the former General Secretary of Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). She is 52 years old and has four surviving children. Her son, Samuel Hloele, was allegedly shot by the eThekweni Anti-Land Invasion Unit according to AbM reports. He is included in the total of 25 members of AbM that they count as having been killed since 2009.

AbM members and activists are determined to improve the lives of poor communities who are still denied their human rights such as adequate housing, water and sanitation. They have spoken out against cases of local government corruption and worked hard to improve the conditions in their community by starting a political school, farm, communal kitchen and shop. In return, they have been met with not just resistance but harassment, intimidation and threats. They have been victims of murders, violence, harassment, and damage to their homes.

The threats and targeting of Nomsa Sizani and members of AbM must be seen against a backdrop of a greater pattern of violence and killings of human rights defenders in South Africa. South Africa's high levels of poverty and inequality, compounded with widespread unemployment and the lack of access to adequate services, has led to a breeding ground of social, political, and economic unrest. It is human rights defenders who are risking their lives to protect the people of South Africa, by combating corruption, advocating for human rights, or fighting to better the lives of others. Yet, they are treated with disdain or worse by the state with little or nothing being done to protect and promote their human rights and to bring suspected perpetrators to justice.

The KZN province where Nomsa Sizani operates is a hotbed for political killings. Between 2000-2021, 418 politically motivated hits were recorded nationwide. Of these, 118 took place in KZN.¹ One of the contributing factors to political violence in KZN is competition over local councillor positions. Councillors have access to political power that can be used to acquire resources – for example, through tenders – which can lead to corruption. Human rights defenders like Nomsa Sizani who expose the wrongdoings of government officials, often face severe risks from the people they seek to hold accountable.

The harassment, intimidation threats and unlawful killings of human rights defenders is a direct attack on civil society. These violations are part of a systemic attempt to intimidate and silence activists in South Africa, undermine movements, like AbM, and discourage others from defending human rights.

In 2023, as part of its annual Write for Rights Campaign, Amnesty International campaigned for the protection of another leader within the ABM, [Thapelo Mohapi](#), who also has had to go into hiding following death threats he has been receiving.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, isiZulu

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 June 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Nomsa Sizani (she/her)

¹ Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, 21 June 2022, *Risk Bulletin No 25*, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/esaobs-risk-bulletin-25/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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