

Murder in KwaNdengezi

Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement, 30 March 2013.

On Good Friday those of us who are Christians remember the murder of Jesus Christ who spurned the rich and walked with the poor. We never forget that Jesus Christ was murdered by the state for the crime of taking the side of the poor. This year Good Friday in KwaNdengezi was marked with the blood, terror and grief of the poor.

At around 22:00pm on Thursday night Dumisane Mdletshe, a 31 year old man whose family live in KwaNdengezi although he no longer lives there, went to the home of a well known, well respected and brave AbM leader in KwaNdengezi. He kicked open the door and entered the home. He had a bush knife. He attacked her grandmother and her uncle and killed them both. They were both AbM members. He then asked for the AbM leader who had escaped in the dark. We are not giving her name until we have secured a safe house for her.

Mdletshe then went to another home, kwaShozi, which is about 2 kilometers away. Here he attacked Mr. Shozi who is the father of another well known, well respected and brave AbM leader. Mr Shozi fought back with the help of his sons. They overpowered their attacker and called the police who arrested Mdletshe. However Mr. Shozi, who is the head of that household, is in hospital in a critical condition.

Neighbours and family members of Mdletshe were shocked at what he had done. But they confirmed that he has no record of mental disturbance. He remained calm while he was attacking and killing which makes people think that he has done this before. AbM leaders in KwaNdengezi, including the two whose homes were attacked on Thursday night, have been subject to serious, ongoing and armed intimidation by the local ward councillor and his thugs for a long time. Shots have been fired into their houses at night. They have often had to sleep outside. We have said very clearly that the Councillor of Ward 12, Mduduzi Christian Ngcobo, who is known as Nqola, is a gangster, a warlord. On the 6th of March the AbM Women's League entered and occupied the City Hall to demand that the serious accusations of intimidation and corruption against Nqola be investigated. They demanded that the City Council take his threats seriously and act to secure the safety of our comrades in KwaNdengezi. They did nothing. They said nothing. We do not count to them.

We have no clear evidence of Mdletshe's motivation. But he made no attempt to rape or to steal. It seems likely that he was hired to execute a political mandate just as it seems likely that the killers of Thembenkosi Qumbelo in Cato Crest two weeks ago were hired to execute a political mandate. If this proves to be true then the blood of KwaNdengezi will be on the hands of the City Council and especially the Speaker, Loggie Naidoo, whose office we occupied to demand action against Nqola.

But the blood of KwaNdengezi will not only be on their hands. The media, the NGOs and the churches all failed to take our warnings seriously. With some exceptions it is clear that our lives do not really count to these people too. It is not just the ANC that have contempt for the poor. Words are just words. It is actions that count. Talking about us is not the same as walking with us.

When we stand up for the dignity of our lives we are being killed on the mines, in the farms and in the shacks. We are being killed by the police and by the ANC. This is the reality of what is known as democracy in South Africa. There is no democracy for the poor other than the democracy that we create in our own struggles.

The Community Policing Forum (CPF), the Councillor, and the Minister of Safety and Security did not pitch up to express their condolences with the family. Our leaders, elected directly by our members, have left their homes that they had traveled long distances to reach to be with their families for Easter. They have left their religious services and holidays. They are there with the bereaved, the injured and frightened. They are there in the dark where any danger can lurk.

Today we call upon the nation, the whole nation, to help us ask two questions:

- Why is the ANC and the eThekweni Municipality keeping Nqola and failing to investigate the allegations of corruption and intimidation against him?
- Who is benefiting from Nqola's use of violence and the barrel of guns to rule and police the KwaNdengezi community?

Today, on the eve of Easter when Christians remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have one question to poor people struggling across the country: How many of us must die before we rise up, defeat the forces of oppression and their politic of fear and death and build a new society that recognises the full and equal dignity of every person?

We will not stop our struggle until the land, wealth and power of this world are shared fairly.

For more information please contact:

Mnikelo Ndabankulu (AbM Spokesperson) - 081 263 3462

Bandile Mdlalose (AbM General Secretary) - 071 424 2815

T.J Ngongoma (AbM DC Chairperson) - 084 613 9772

Cícero Guedes is assassinated

<http://www.mstbrazil.org/content/c%C3%ADcero-guedes-coordinator-occupation-cambahyba-mill-assassinated-rio>

Rural worker and MST activist Cícero Guedes was assassinated by gunmen on Friday, January 25 near the Cambahyba Mill, in the township of Campos dos Goytacazes (RJ). Cícero was shot in the head when he left the settlement on his bicycle. Born in Alagoas, he was a cane cutter and coordinated the MST occupation of the mill, which is a complex of seven farms totaling 3500 hectares.

This large estate (latifundio) was ruled unproductive according to the decision made by Federal Judge Dario Ribeiro Machado Junior, issued in June. The area belongs to the late Heli Ribeiro Gomes, former deputy governor of Rio and is now controlled by his heirs. Cícero Guedes had been a settler since 2002 in the Brava Gente Ranch in the north of Rio de Janeiro state in the Zumbi dos Palmares settlement, but he continued to carry on the struggle for agrarian reform. He was a source of knowledge about agro-ecology for the comrades in the Movement as well as for the students and professors of the University of Fluminense North.

On his land, he developed techniques for organic farming with a diversity of plants, respecting nature and taking advantage of all that it could give. He began with the planting of a "live" fence of a type of mimosa bush that beautified his property and also served as a good source of income.

Cícero was also known for his banana trees, planted in many parts of his plot intermixed with vegetables, corn and fruit. His children grew up seeing the experience develop and learning with their father that organic produce is of better quality than that from the supermarket.

The farmer-settler Cícero Guedes dos Santos, from the beginning of the occupation of that piece of land in 2002, already wanted to have a diversity of plants in his area, respecting nature and taking advantage of all that it could give. And nature was the source of inspiration for this type of consciousness and the understanding of nature caused this feeling for conservation and living in harmony with nature to grow day-by-day.

Violence of the latifundio

The latifundio has been the stage for every type of violence: exploitation of child labor, exploitation of slave labor, failure to pay workers' wages, as well as environmental crimes.

In December, the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária*, INCRA) committed to create a settlement in the area of the mill but until now the families have not been settled on the land.

The death of Comrade Cícero is the result of the violence of the latifundio, of impunity regarding deaths of the Landless and of the slowness of INCRA to settle the families and carry out agrarian reform. The MST demands that the guilty parties be indicted, convicted, and imprisoned.

The farms of the Cambahyba Mill get millions in loans from the State and its process of expropriation has been paralyzed for 14 years -- since INCRA ruled that the land was unproductive and subject to expropriation for agrarian reform.

However the debt that the mill owes is not limited to the financial aspect. Last May, Brazilians were horrified by the revelation that the ovens of Cambahyba were used to incinerate the bodies of 10 political activists during the civilian-military dictatorship. The confession of the former delegate of the Department for Political and Social Order (DOPS), Claudio Guerra, states the fact in the book, "Memories of a Dirty War" and it was published in the press.

Up to now however the Federal Court has prevented the expropriation of the area and has already carried out violent evictions of the families who claim the land. This is the second time that the MST has carried out an occupation in the area of the mill.

The first time was in 2000 and six years later, the Federal and Military Police, on the decision of the Federal Court of Campos, evicted the 100 families who created the encampment Oziel Alves II.

Authorities express regrets on the killing of the MST coordinator in Rio

The Director of the Office of Human Rights in the office of the president, the Minister of Agrarian Development and INCRA, expressed regrets on the killing of the MST coordinator Cícero Guedes and condemned the latifundio violence in Campos dos Goytacazes in the north of Rio de Janeiro state.

The burial was carried out on Sunday afternoon in the Campo de Paz Cemetery. Besides family members and friends, those present included MST activists and settlers from the region. Carlos Guedes, president of INCRA, State Deputy Marcelo Freixo, and Bishop of Campos Dom Roberto Francisco Ferreira Paz, also attended the service.

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"The death is the sign that the authorities are incapable of seeing what is so visible, which is impunity. It's cowardice not to carry out agrarian reform, even more cowardice not to punish the killers and even more to allow the slowness of the bureaucracy not to do its part, leading the workers to death. Each one has a piece of the blame. It's necessary to react, we are going to oppose the crimes of agrarian reform, one of the ways is to do it", stated Maria de Oliveira, former superintendent of INCRA in Pernambuco and technical director of the Institute of Land and Agrarian Reform of Pernambuco.

"While the Brazilian State does not carry out agrarian reform, does not take a position in relation to the concentration of land, the Brazilian people and primarily those who struggle in an organized way, continue to die at the hands of power. We have no way to arrive at peace in the countryside without agrarian reform", stated Oliveira.

For Marcos Antonio Pedlowski, Professor in the State University of North Fluminense, the social movements should demand the investigation and imprisonment of the killers, in addition to continuing the organizational effort. "Cícero is one more death for those who are opposed to agrarian reform and the structural transformations that we need in Brazil", the professor believes.

Andries Tatane killed again

<http://thinkingafricarhodesuniversity.blogspot.com/2013/03/andries-tatane-killed-again.html>

31 March 2013

City Press Editorial

Sometimes, Mzansi can simply break your heart.

We all witnessed Andries Tatane's very public and brutal death.

The SABC captured for all to see Tatane's arrest, his attempts to tear away from police, the shot fired into his chest, his fall to the ground and the red blood that gushed from his wound as life ebbed from him.

Who can forget his friend, Molefi Nonyane, holding his slumped body as his tears flowed. His shock was palpable and so was the nation's.

For weeks in April 2011, South Africa went through a period of soul-searching as Tatane's public death became a symbol of parts of our country where neglect was high.

Andries Tatane was 33 years old when he died.

He was a model citizen who tried everything to make his town of Meqheleng a better place, a place of freedom's promise.

He hosted a radio slot. He taught young people basic skills at extracurricular lessons.

Tatane organised the Meqheleng Concerned Citizens forum to lobby for better infrastructure, for water provision and for sewage systems.

He and his fellow comrades knew corruption was rampant and they blew the whistle repeatedly.

Tatane was an ANC cadre who became disillusioned, joined the Congress of the People and then finally quit parliamentary politics to go back to civic protest.

On one of many marches, he was gunned down.

We also saw who did it, or we thought we did.

How is it then that seven accused were acquitted on Friday of Andries Tatane's murder.

How? We saw him being shot. There were a limited number of officers policing the march.

Who pulled the trigger that killed him? It can't have been nobody because we all saw him die.

Justice failed Andries Tatane this week as seven people were acquitted of his murder by Magistrate Hein van Niekerk, who said the dead man was not the hero the media paints him as.

Did this mean he deserved to die? We all know, because we all bore witness, that the police who killed Tatane did not do so in self-defence but in cold blood.

In the end, the men were acquitted because of a lack of evidence, though the nation was witness both to the killing and the killers.

The criminal justice system failed Andries Tatane miserably this week and it failed us too by slipshod investigation, pathetic prosecution and a questionable judgment.

What are you going to do about it?