

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 March 17, to speak about a development taking place there. The threats began the next day and have escalated since March 23, 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 a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 29.24**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

President Cyril Ramaphosa

Private Bag X463

Pretoria, 0001

South Africa

Email: president@presidency.gov.za

Copies to: presidentrsa@presidency.gov.za

South African Embassy in the United States

Her Excellency Nomaindiya Cathleen Mfeketo

3051 Massachusetts Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20008

Email: info.saembassydc@dirco.gov.za

Salutation: Dear Ambassador

Dear President Ramaphosa, or Dear Ambassador,

I am writing to raise your attention to 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 March 17. On March 18, Nomsa Sizani received a threatening phone call, saying "if you don't shut that mouth, we will shut it for you".

These threats continue to escalate. On March 26, 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 March 31, three men arrived at her home looking for her. She has now been forced into hiding.

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 investigate the death threats against Nomsa Sizani and to ensure her safety and security. Anyone suspected of being responsible for the threats should be 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 defenders.

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 or 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 KZN¹. One of the contributing factors to political violence in KZN is competition over local councilor positions. Councilors 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, or your own language.

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Nomsa Sizani (she/her)

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