

UA 58/99

"Disappearance" / Fear for safety

31 March 1999

SOUTH AFRICA Vasi NTULI, African National Congress (ANC) member

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Vasi Ntuli, who has not been seen since he was shot and abducted on the morning of 29 March 1999.

Vasi Ntuli, a member of the ANC, was shot from a van as he waited for a bus in Mhlanzini, in the Nhlabani area of KwaMbonambi, northern KwaZulu Natal. The people in the van bundled him into the vehicle and drove off. The van, a white four-wheel-drive with blue stripes, belongs to Counsellor Mtetwa, a counsellor to the local *Inkosi* (Chief) Mtholeni Mbuyazi. Counsellor Mtetwa is aligned with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

Vasi Ntuli's shooting and abduction were apparently witnessed by many students and teachers on their way to a nearby school. All the witnesses are extremely fearful of making statements.

Vasi Ntuli had earlier made a statement at KwaMbonambi police station about an incident he witnessed on 6 March 1999, when ANC members including Walter Felgate, formerly of the IFP, were beaten up at Mankwathini electoral registration station, where they were putting up election posters. Those responsible are believed to be connected to Counsellor Mtetwa.

Vasi Ntuli is a longstanding member of the Nhlabani Area ANC branch, in KwaMbonambi. On about 11 March 1999, he and two other members of the same ANC branch were beaten up by men in camouflage uniform who claimed to be from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). It is not clear if they actually were members of the SANDF.

The KwaMbonambi police have opened an investigation docket, number CR 118-3-99, on the shooting and abduction of Vasi Ntuli, but they do not appear to be actively investigating the incident. They appear to be afraid to investigate the case properly, or to interview the main suspects.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of witnesses to both incidents, some of whom are believed to have gone into hiding in fear for their lives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Political violence in KwaZulu Natal province appears to be increasing in the run-up to the general elections in June, fuelled by competition between the ANC, the IFP and the relatively new United Democratic Movement (UDM) for the loyalties of communities and the electorate. There is local-level politically-motivated violence in various parts of the province, despite discussion between the various parties on political cooperation at the national level. Police failure to carry out their duties impartially and effectively in politically divided communities in the province is a long-standing problem.

Some of the suspects in the abduction of Vasi Ntuli and the beatings at Mankwathini are currently on trial for killing Martin Mathonsi in September 1996. They are out on bail. Martin Mathonsi was shot dead while attending an ANC branch meeting which was broken up by Counsellor Mtetwa and a group of armed followers. The KwaMbonambi police did not come to help. On several occasions police have indicated their unwillingness to intervene to stop threats and violence carried out by Counsellor Mtetwa and his followers. There are also claims that police have supplied weapons to this group.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing fears for the safety of Vasi Ntuli, a member of Nhlabani ANC branch, whose whereabouts are unknown since he was shot and abducted on 29 March 1999 in the Nhlabani Area of KwaMbonambi, northern KwaZulu Natal, by men in a white 4x4 vehicle with blue stripes which is understood to belong to Counsellor Mtetwa, counsellor to the local Inkosi Mtholeni Mbuyazi;
- expressing concern that Vasi Ntuli appears to have been targeted because he witnessed an earlier incident, on 6 March 1999, in which ANC members were beaten up at Mankwathini electoral registration station, and made a statement about this incident to the KwaMbonambi police;
- appealing for an urgent inquiry by independent investigators into the shooting and abduction of Vasi Ntuli, to establish his current whereabouts or fate, and to take the case, number CR 118-3-99, out of the hands of the local KwaMbonambi police, who have failed to ensure the safety of witnesses and to properly investigate other incidents linked to the same suspects;
- urging the authorities to ensure the protection of witnesses cooperating with any investigation into Vasi Ntuli's abduction on 29 March, or into the earlier incident on 6 March.

APPEALS TO:

Mr T M Mbeki, Executive Deputy President, Private Bag X955, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Fax: + 27 12 323 2573/6 or + 27 21 462 2837/8

Mr F S Mufamadi, Minister for Safety and Security, Private Bag X463, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Fax: + 27 12 339 2819/20 or + 27 21 461 2594

Commissioner J G Fivaz, National Commissioner, South African Police Service, Private Bag X94, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Fax: + 27 12 339 1640

Mr Lionel Mtshali, Premier - KwaZulu Natal Province, Private Bag X01, Ulundi 3838, South Africa Fax: +27 358 874 2001 or Private Bag X54323, Durban 4000

Fax: + 27 31 360 6578

COPIES TO:

Commissioner C P J Serfontein, Provincial Commissioner of Police, KwaZulu Natal Province, South African Police Service, PO Box 1965, Durban 4000, South Africa

Fax: + 27 31 321 974 or + 27 31 332 0211

Mr N J Ngubane, MEC for Safety and Security, KwaZulu Natal Provincial Legislature, Private Bag X01, Ulundi 3838

Fax: + 27 358 874 2781

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4001, South Africa

Network of Independent Monitors, National Office, Room 132, Sangro House,
417 Smith Street, Durban 4001, South Africa

and to diplomatic representatives of South Africa accredited to your
country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 May 1999.