

## women in the struggle

# gladys maqolo

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Black Sash Archives

*Three years ago, Gladys Maqolo was the mother of three healthy sons. Today one is missing. He 'disappeared' after a brief period in detention. Another is at home. He has brain damage following a few days' police custody. The third is in detention, where he has been since police caught up with him in May. Mrs Maqolo's story hardly bears reading, yet in South Africa under the State of Emergency, it is not unique.*

Mrs Gladys Maqolo, 61, has visited the Black Sash Advice Office in Port Elizabeth many times during the past two years. She is a heavily built woman with an expression of constant anxiety on her face. She has the ability to find the right word and phrase to describe her situation and to express her feelings.

Mrs Maqolo's husband spent eight years on Robben Island, but her son, Mbuyiselo Maxin was not 'political' at all, unlike Willem, his older brother the trade unionist, and Afrika, who is a UDF member and a lead singer at rallies and funerals.

On 1 October 1984 Mbuyiselo was robbed on his way home from visiting a friend. He was injured and spent the night in hospital.

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The next morning he went to the CID to lay a charge, as he had recognised one of the robbers. The CID officer tried to dissuade Mbuyiselo from laying the charge, saying he knew the robber and he had no father. After a few days Mbuyiselo went to the charge office again. He never returned.

Mrs Maqolo looked all over for him to no avail. After five days she received a message to go to Livingstone Hospital, as he was there, but she must get a permit to see him. She went immediately without a permit. When she got to her son's bed she found him 'like a madman. He did not recognise me. He was tied to his bed and screaming. Police were guarding him. I asked the doctor what was wrong with him. He said he had blood on his brain, which was now damaged. The doctor said I should ask at St Albans what happened; they should know'.

Mrs Maqolo then got permission to visit her son. On the permit it said he was sentenced to 60 days or a R30 fine. When it came to the charge there was only a cross.

'That was the worst thing to me because they never said what he was charged for.' Mrs Maqolo gave the paper to her lawyer, who ascertained that he was charged with 'communicating with a prisoner in custody'.

Then followed a series of events about which Mrs Maqolo is very clear but that take on the quality of a nightmare as her son is repeatedly ferried back and forth between prison and hospital with her trying desperately to trace him. Eventually a police van and an ambulance arrived at her house and her son was carried in 'like a dead baby. He had pyjamas and gown on. His jeans and other clothing were in a kit bag; the jeans had been washed clean.' He had been a healthy thirty-year old, the breadwinner of the family.

'Four days later the vans returned. Two African policemen came into the house. They said, "Mother, we have come to fetch your son again." I started to scream at them. I said this is too much, you should get finished with him now. I gave him back to them: My son lifted his head and looked at the police — the tears in his eyes.'

The following day he was returned to her. They said, 'Mama, he is finished now; he will never go back to jail.' One African policeman said, 'Mother, my hands are clean of this business, I am just bringing him back.'

Mrs Maqolo replied, 'One day God will dig it out because this man did nothing to the government. The paper from prison did not even know why he was there.'

Mrs Maqolo's lawyer attempted to investigate this case, but a co-prisoner transported to St Albans with Mbuyiselo, who initially said he was unharmed in the van, changed his evidence to say he had a head injury before he was taken to prison. In

addition, the authority to procure medical reports was refused by the Commissioner of Prisons and a letter from the Head of the Prison stated that his injuries were not sustained in prison.

Mrs Maqolo's attempts to get a disability grant for Mbuyiselo met with problems. The medical report stated that he had no defect of speech or sight. He appears to have no sight in one eye and only his mother can understand his speech. After many months he received a pension, but it stopped after four months. She has now re-applied, but is still waiting for its renewal (1987).

In February Mrs Maqolo had two major worries. The first was that her son Willem, aged 40 and a mine cook in Springs, had disappeared. He was detained for a short while in September 1986, and she has been unable to trace his whereabouts since his release. He never paid her his usual Christmas visit. The police had been searching for her son Afrika, and during one of their visits they found a letter from Afrika to Willem. She thinks maybe this has something to do with his disappearance.

Her second problem was that security police never stopped coming to her house looking for Afrika, at all odd hours. She told them she did not know where he was although he sometimes came to see her.

On 8 December 1986 Mrs Maqolo came into the office with a pamphlet, showing a photograph of Afrika with 'WE WANT HIM/ONS SOEK HOM' and his name below it. Attached to it was information about the consumer boycott, implying he was responsible for it. There is no indication as to who issued the pamphlets, but they were handed out near the New Brighton police station. Mrs Maqolo said: 'They must rather kill him in front of me so at least I will *know* when he is dead.' She wanted people to know about the campaign against her son in case he disappeared. She says she realised the police fear the name *Maqolo* — 'when they hear that name they go gloomy on their inside.'

On one occasion when the police arrived again looking for Afrika and couldn't find him, they wanted to take her brain-damaged son Mbuyiselo again. She says he 'went mad with fear and screamed at the police' and eventually they left him.

Mrs Maqolo spent a month in hospital last year with ulcers and 'nervous collapse'. The doctor gave us tranquillisers for her, and this is helping.

The latest news on Mbuyiselo's condition is that he has improved a bit, can feed himself and is walking better.

And on 9 May, the security police finally caught up with Afrika. Said Mrs Maqolo: 'At least they have admitted they have him. I know he is in prison'. □