

Guilty until proved innocent?

Gumede was taken to a cold, dirty cell where she was told to wait for the investigating officer, who would question her further. She was also told that only her lawyer could speak with her from that moment onwards.

"All my reasoning and pleas of innocence fell on deaf ears," Gumede said. About 8pm she was brought back to the barred waiting-room. She was informed that bail had been arranged by a



Paula Gumede

Much has been said recently about police efforts to improve relations with the communities they serve. The recent experience of an Idasa staff member in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, shows they still have a long way to go.

When police arrived they searched Gumede's cousin and asked to see her handbag. They then took her to the Mitchells Plain police station.

Once again she was asked where she had received the money, and once again she explained that the notes were part of the cash payment she had received from foreign visitors. She also told the police how to contact the foreigners to verify her account of events.

Gumede and her son were taken to a barred room and told to wait. A police officer said her case was serious and she would need a lawyer. She asked to use the phone and, after being made to wait for an hour, was allowed to contact an Idasa colleague.

When one of the police officers spoke to her in Afrikaans (which she did not understand) and she asked him to explain what he had said, his threatening reply was: "You had better learn to speak Afrikaans, lady!"

Together with her son, whom the police refused to allow her sister to take home,

lawyer through Idasa's regional director, David Schmidt.

One police officer then demanded to know what colour Schmidt was. When she asked why he wanted to know this, she was told not to ask questions. When she told them Schmidt was white, the officer left her alone.

"I felt degraded and treated like a criminal. It was as if all my dignity was taken away from me," Gumede said. Her tearful pleas to be informed why she was being kept in custody were ignored. She was taken back to the same filthy cell to wait for the investigating officer - who never arrived.

She was kept in the cell overnight. "My shoulders were sore from the cold and I had slept on a stinking mat with only two stinking blankets to cover me."

About 11am on Sunday morning the investigating officer arrived and took Gumede to his office in Cape Town. He expressed dismay at her account of the way the Mitchells Plain police had handled the case. He also examined the two allegedly counterfeit R10 notes and found that they were valid.

Gumede made a sworn statement and was released immediately. She says she believes her arrest was totally unnecessary and that neither Shoprite nor the police were willing to consider her explanation. "I still do not understand why it was necessary for me to be kept overnight at the police station. I feel that the police were unreasonable and treated me unfairly and rudely and that they acted in a racist manner. My son had nightmares right through Sunday night, which he has never had before."

● A Shoprite spokesperson said Shoprite did not wish to comment other than to say that they had not arrested Gumede, they had merely called the police.

Shireen Badat is an administrator in Idasa's media department.

FOR Paula Gumede, guide/presenter in Idasa's One City Tours, a routine trip to buy groceries on a Saturday afternoon turned into an 18-hour ordeal at the hands of the local police when she was suspected of paying with counterfeit money.

Gumede has now laid a charge of unlawful arrest against the manager of the Shoprite supermarket in Mitchells Plain and certain members of the Mitchells Plain police force.

During the Saturday morning she had taken a group of foreign visitors on a tour of greater Cape Town and had been paid in cash for the outing. In the afternoon, accompanied by her eight-year-old autistic son, her sister and cousin, she went to the Shoprite supermarket in Mitchells Plain.

When she attempted to pay for her shopping, she was horrified when the cashier claimed that two of the R10 notes she offered were false because the silver strip authenticating the notes was missing.

Store security staff were summoned to examine the notes and the security officer instructed the cashier to deduct R20 from the bill and to remove groceries worth that amount. The two R10 notes were passed around to other employees, causing a commotion in the store.

Despite Gumede's protestations of innocence, the security officer took her, together with her son, sister and cousin, upstairs for further questioning, and called the police.

Relations worsen ... but all's not lost

THE relationship between blacks and whites in South Africa is at its worst since 1984.

These are the findings of a Gallup Poll on socio-political and economic trends carried out by the Markinor research group among 800 whites nationally and 1 000 blacks in metropolitan areas during April/May 1993 as part of an ongoing tracking study.

The percentage of metropolitan blacks who feel that the relationship between the races is deteriorating has jumped from 15% in May 1992 to 49% in May 1993. The percentage of whites who see a deterioration has also shown a dramatic jump from 18% a year ago to 48%.

In the Western Cape in particular it was found that polarisation between the races was at its greatest, where 58% of blacks polled felt that the relationship between blacks and whites was poor. Of blacks polled in the region, 53.6% also felt that the relationship between blacks and whites was getting worse.

However, despite this deterioration in black-white relations, more than half of metropolitan blacks and whites nationwide are able to see a light at the end of the tunnel. In answer to the question, "How confident are you in a happy future for all races in South Africa?", 52% of blacks and 56% of whites said they were very or fairly confident.