

Women take a stand

Violet Mncube lives in Thokoza. She is one of many women who came face to face with the horror of the violence on the East Rand of Johannesburg. When Mncube was invited to attend a march organised by women, she did not hesitate. On 27 October 1993, she, together with 1 000 other women from Thokoza, marched on the offices of the African National Congress (ANC) because they have had enough — enough of the violence in their communities. They say the ANC has not done enough to help their communities deal with the violence.

The women demanded an end to the meaningless killings that have claimed the lives of more than 1 300 people in less than a year. They also wanted the Internal Stability Unit (ISU) out of the townships. The ISU was sent into the East Rand to keep law and order. Instead, according to residents, the ISU is partly to blame for the breakdown of law and order and the violence.

Mncube knows this very well. She would do anything to make sure that no other woman ever has to experience what she did one day in September last year. Mncube was lucky to escape with her life. Another woman was not so lucky.

“I was on my way home with my grandson after visiting my husband’s mother. I got into a

Women from communities on the East Rand are tired of seeing people being killed every day. They are organising themselves to demand an end to violence and the removal of the Internal Stability Unit from their townships. *Thandeka Mbuli* takes a closer look at the situation

taxi at Natalspruit Hospital,” Mncube said.

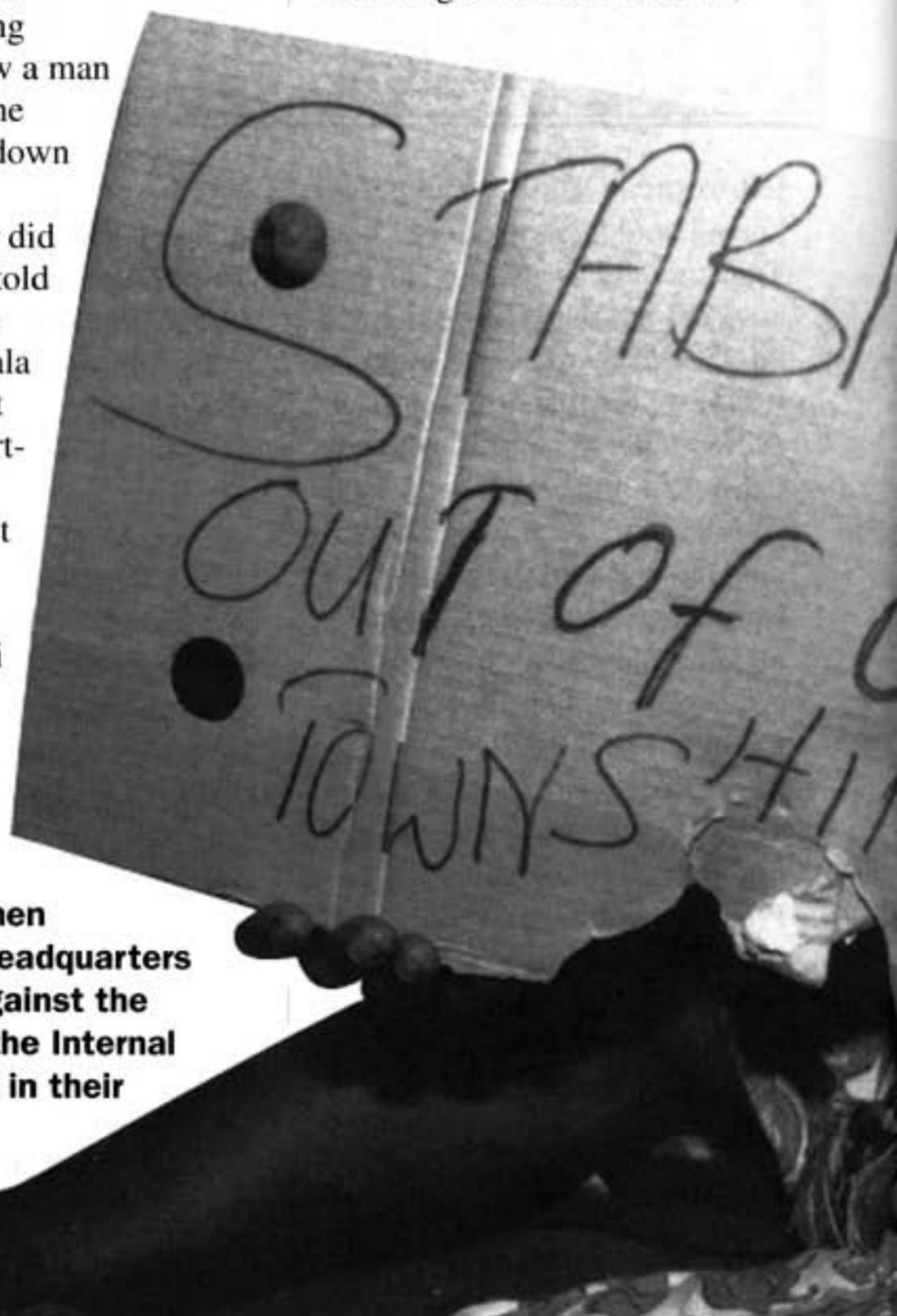
She said, after the driver dropped off two women carrying babies, she saw a man indicating to the driver to turn down a road.

“The driver did what the man told him and drove into KwaMadala Hostel. We got scared and started shouting at the driver to let us out, but he just drove on.

“As the taxi drove into the hostel area, I saw a green police van parked at the

Thokoza women at the ANC headquarters protesting against the presence of the Internal Stability Unit in their township

side of the gate. Its door was open and four white ISU policemen with guns were standing outside the vehicle,”



against violence

Mncube remembered.

She said two of the policemen came to the taxi and started counting the passengers.

She said the taxi went into the yard of the hostel and parked behind another green ISU vehicle.

"Two white police-

men, also with guns, got out of the car. One stood in front and another at the back of the taxi.

Mncube and the other passengers were ordered to go into a room, where a woman with a machine gun was sitting on the floor and five men were standing against the wall.

"We were told to take off our clothes. While we were taking off our clothes, members of the police came in to pick out their victims," she said.

At this time, Mncube's grandson started crying and saying he wanted to go home because he was scared. She was very surprised when they told her she could go.

"As I grabbed my clothes, a woman who knew me grabbed my hand and told me to say goodbye to her family for her. She was not crying, she was just sad," remembered Mncube.

"When I walked through the gates, one of the policemen pointed a gun at me and said to me: 'You must have prayed hard. No ANC supporter gets out of here alive.'"

Mncube was so frightened that she only told her family about the incident the next day and decided to go to the woman's home to give the message to her family.

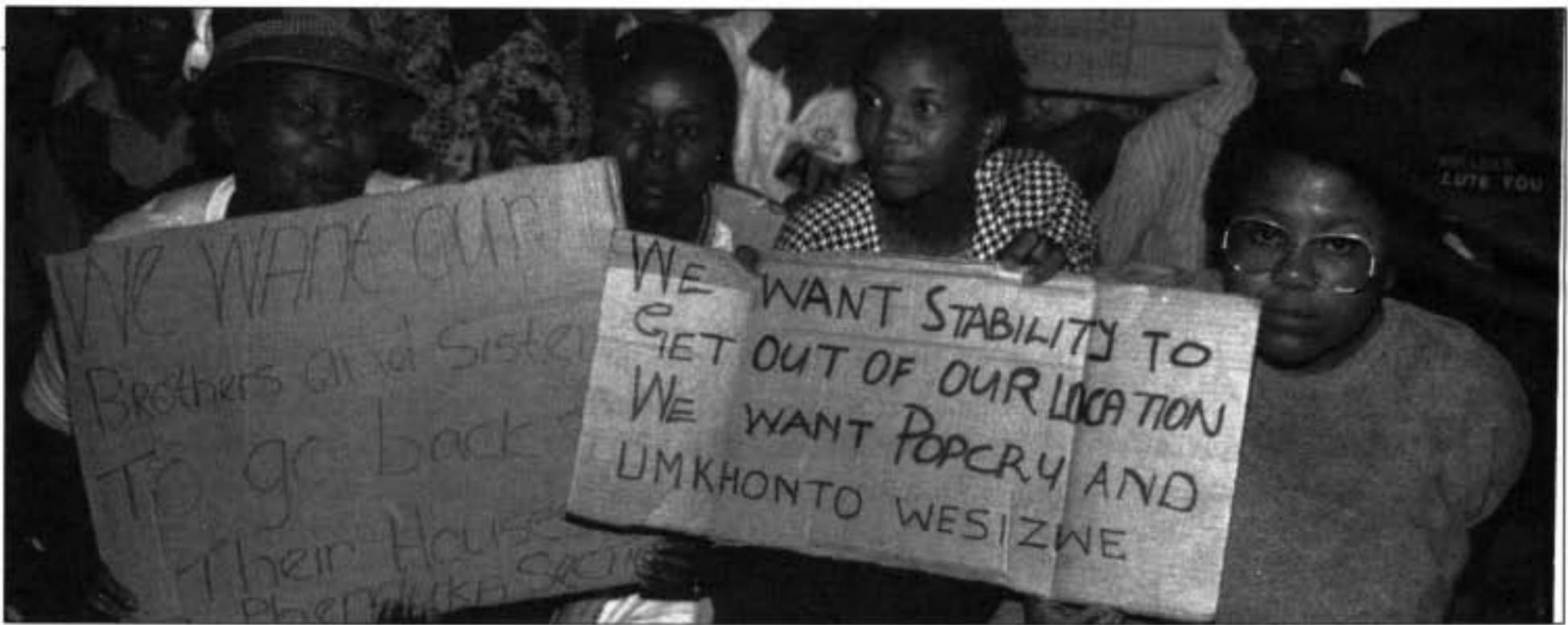
"When I got to her house, I was told the family had found the woman's body in the Germiston Mortuary."

The police claimed they had found her body in the veld.

"People say we want chaos and lawlessness when we say we want the ISU out of our townships, but how could they (the ISU) let

Photo: Phumla Rado





Thokoza women say enough is enough: We want the Internal Stability Unit out

people be taken to their deaths and do nothing?"

The police don't agree. They said the police were not responsible for the violence on the East Rand and that the ISU had only killed 16 people in the area so far.

Witwatersrand SAP spokesperson Colonel Dave Bruce said the ISU will not be withdrawn from the township until the violence has gone down.

Three women who spoke at the march accused the ISU of breaking into their houses, damaging their property, raping women, arresting people and not informing their families of the arrests, and pointing guns at little children.

The marchers called on the ANC to help them remove the ISU from their communities.

Mncube's story is just one of many women have come face to face with the brutality of the ISU.

SPEAK tried to find out how many women have been raped, but could not. A field-worker in the area said many women did not report that they have been raped because they are too scared and ashamed to

A Poem by Thabang Mabidikama from Alexandra

**last night I heard a gun
shot**

**I knew another life was
gone**

**I knew the grave
population was multiplied
Who will stop this war?**

**people die everywhere
in trains, in buses, in
homes**

**the mass media is
flooded with slaughter
Who will stop this war?**

leaders talk.....

negotiate.....

**peace accords are signed
they are misconstrued
Who will stop this war?**

**as corruption escalates
where is justice?**

**how do we justify killing
innocents**

Who will stop this war?

tell people about it.

Since the women's anti-ISU march, two meetings between police and the ANC have failed to take place. The police did not come to the meetings.

This did not stop the communities from taking the matter further.

On November 10, people from the East Rand demonstrated outside the World Trade Centre (where the multi-party negotiations are taking place) calling on organisations and parties to support their plea for the ISU to be removed.

In a statement to the negotiating council, the demonstrators said: "The government of the National Party has let loose their security forces to harass, torture, rape, arrest and kill our people in Thokoza and Kathlehong. The life of a black person has become very cheap in the eyes of the government.

"We have had enough of their barbaric method and we are making a plea that they should leave us in peace and not in pieces."

People in the East Rand say they long for peace, especially over Christmas and the New Year. ☀