

NO TO RAPE SAY PORT ALFRED WOMEN



Drawing by Sarah Hillis

The town of Port Alfred is in the Eastern Cape. The township of Port Alfred is well organised with a civic organisation, parents-teachers-students association, and a pensioners organisation. All organisations are very active. People in the township stand together and make important decisions through the street and area committees.

The Port Alfred Women's organisation (PAWO) was formed in March 1986 when women in the township joined. On the first Sunday of every month, PAWO women meet to talk about things in the township. On Sunday 3 of May 1986 they had something very important to talk about - an all women stayaway. Here is an interview with a woman from PAWO, Koleka Nkwinti. Kally Forrest spoke with Koleka about the stayaway PAWO organised in May, 1986. SPEAK thanks all of these women for the opportunity to share their story with SPEAK readers.

WHY DID PAWO DECIDE TO ORGANISE A STAYAWAY?

"Early in the morning of Saturday the 3 of May a 59 year old woman was raped in the township stadium. The rapist also stabbed and assaulted this old woman, Mrs Maliwe Glass. He had raped other women in the past.

Mrs Glass pointed out the rapist to the police. The police arrested him, and a very sick Mrs Glass was taken to hospital in Grahamstown. The same afternoon the police released the rapist. They did not charge him for the assault or the rape. He was totally free.

The women of the township were very, very angry. This rapist is never charged by the police. The police protected and looked after him. We are afraid of this man. Women are afraid to walk alone in the streets because of him.

All women in PAWO decided to organise a stayaway to protest against the release of this rapist. We also wanted a stayaway to protest against the detentions of 5 women students from the local school."

WHAT WERE PAWOS DEMANDS?

"PAWO demanded that the police charge the rapist with rape and assault. We also demanded the release of the 5 school students. If the police met our demands then we would go back to work.

We also demanded that the white women in town come to speak to women in the township. We wanted to show and tell them about our problems in the townships. We know that all women, black and white, fear rape. We felt white women may understand and be sympathetic to us. We also wanted white women with husbands in the police to explain our problems to their husbands. We wanted the women to explain how bad it was to release a violent rapist back into the township."

HOW DID THE WHITE COMMUNITY DEAL WITH YOUR DEMANDS?

"The white women were not sympathetic. We were surprised, we thought they will feel for us. The white women just got angry. We think they were angry because they now had to do their own housework.

On Wednesday the Port Alfred Employers Federation came to speak to our civic organisation in the township. The Employers Federation speak to the civic when there is a boycott. The Federation did not come to PAWO to speak with us. So we told our men in the civic: 'Please do not negotiate for us. This is a women's problem. Men do not get raped.' So the men in the township did not speak for us. They told the Employer's Federation to come and speak to PAWO.

The Employer's Federation would not speak to PAWO. But this did not worry us. We wanted to speak to the white women in the town.

On Monday (a week after the stayaway began), a group of white English-speaking women came to PAWO to talk. We showed these white women around the township. We wanted these women to know how we live. PAWO and these white women decided to meet and talk again in the future.

On Monday night we called off the stayaway. PAWO members were happy to go on talking to these white women. The rapist was charged with assault, but not with rape. But township people were so angry that it was not possible for the rapist to stay



in the community any more. He no longer lives in Port Alfred."

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE STAYAWAY?

Early next morning (Tuesday 6 May) police detained me (Koleka Nkwinti) and 3 other PAWO members. Police also detained my husband, brother-in-law and 7 other men from the community.

The police questioned me about the stayaway. They wanted to know who was behind the stayaway. They did not believe that I alone organised everything. They thought men in the

township organised the stayaway. They think men are behind everything women do.

I feel that women of Port Alfred became very strong. I was held in prison far away from Port Alfred. But women hired a car to visit me and bring me food. Also PAWO plans to do many things in the township. The women are really united and strong."

DO TOWNSHIP MEN AND WOMEN TALK ABOUT RAPE ?

"It is very important to talk openly about the problem of rape. Most people don't talk about rape. They are ashamed and shy. Often the family of the raped girl or women don't want to talk about it.

But in Port Alfred it is different. We started organising in our community around education, child-care, pensions, and so on. We started talking about all the problems and things that we need to change. So we also talk about rape, and any sexual assault on a woman. Port Alfred people see any sexual assault as another kind of oppression. Men and women think the same about this - we are united in the struggle.

A raped woman is trusted. If she says she was raped, we support her. It does not matter who the woman is. Even if she is a drunkard and she gets raped, the rape is still a crime against her. In fact it is worse because she was in a weak position. Our women and men do not blame a woman for a rape. We do not say that the rape was woman's fault. So women can talk about sexual harassment openly and they will get community support."