
AFFIDAVIT OF ELIZABETH ROSALIA ABRAHAMS

I, the undersigned

ELIZABETH ROSALIA ABRAHAMS

do hereby make oath and state that:

- 1 I am an adult female residing in Alexander. I am 65 years of age. I was born on 27 January 1955.
- 2 Unless the context indicates otherwise, the facts contained in this affidavit are within my personal knowledge and are, to the best of my belief, both true and correct.

PURPOSE OF THIS AFFIDAVIT

- 3 The purpose of this affidavit is to set out the duration and conditions under which I was arrested and detained at John Vorster Square and subsequently ended up at Fort Prison. I also set out the identity of some of the perpetrators involved in my assault and interrogation.

EAL GF

POLITICAL CONSCIENTIZATION

- 4 My father was born in Botswana and he later settled in South Africa. My father was of colored descent. I was born in Alexandra township, Johannesburg. I completed my secondary schooling at Immaculate Catholic School in Diepkloof Soweto. I had two siblings, a brother Biekie Abrahams and a sister, Elsie Abrahams. We would travel regularly to Botswana. At a certain stage, I needed to apply for a "book of Life" as was required. Challenges arose when the authorities charged with the process of issuing the document in South Africa, refused to classify me as "colored". We then travelled to Botswana to have my documentation issued there by virtue of the fact that my father was born in Botswana. My father was also refused this request. He was told that he had resided in South Africa for a lengthy period of time and had paid taxes in South Africa and not in Botswana. For this reason, I was refused an identification document and classified as black African.

- 5 The emptiness of having to "beg" for an identity, resonated with me and awoke in me the reality of the plight of our people and been oppressed by the South African Nationalist Government.

- 6 In 1973 I became involved with SASM, the South African Student Movement which was affiliated to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) involved with the likes of Tsietsi Mashinini (Mashinini), Barney Mogathli (Mogathathli) and Selby Mokoena (Mokoena). Furthering the aims of SASM I actively recruited new members, organised and conducted awareness campaigns highlighting the appalling plight of Black students under the Apartheid Bantu Education system. I accompanied my brother who was active at these meetings. The awareness campaigns were not only confined to my own school but involved interactions and meetings with other SASM branches across the country. In early 1974 I was recruited by comrade Joyce Dipale to the BCM. I later learned that she was an ANC underground operative. On 16 June 1976, I was part of the hundreds of students that marched in retaliation for the government imposing of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in our schools. Because my brother and I were active, we were both targeted by the security branch. After the occurrence of the 1976 riots, I took Mashinini, Mogathle, Mokoena and my siblings into exile to Botswana. I also took Mike Msimango into exile where they were placed in safe houses in Botswana. There was a particular route that was found between Mafikeng and

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Botswana which was utilized to cross over. I became a courier ie a person who would escort activists to Botswana. I was the "go-between."

ARREST

- 7 I was arrested on 30 July 1977 at fourth avenue, Alexander. I was nineteen years old. My nickname was "Lele". It was just five days after I had entered the country again after returning from Botswana that I was arrested. We had returned after celebrating the one year anniversary of June 16, 1976. I had learnt to not spend too much time at one place to avoid been arrested. In fact, if I had spent two days at one place, it was too much. One had to move all the time to evade arrest by the special branch. I knew that I was a wanted person. My parents were divorced and my parents lived at separate addresses but at Alexander. Both were continuously harassed by the special branch. The members of special branch were not specifically from one area. They were based all over. In June 1977, I discussed with my father whether I should go into exile. My father discouraged me saying that both my siblings were already in exile, he could not lose the only remaining child as well, viz myself. I did not discuss this with my mother as we did not discuss such things.

- 8 On 29 July 1977, I went to the home of my cousin Promise. The purpose thereof was to spend the night there. Promise's mum was my aunt. She had left for Bloemfontein to attend a funeral. At around 2am the next morning, I heard a soft knock and a voice saying: "Le, it's me." I recognized the voice as that of my mother and opened the door. The sooner I had opened the door, I just faced torches in my face. There was a African policeman who identified me. He told me that I had made a fool of him referring to the number of times he would come to my home, enquiring about the whereabouts of Elizabeth Abrahams, not knowing that it was me that he was looking for. I had repeatedly told him that Elizabeth was not home. On been identified, I ran through the policeman and rushed towards nearby drains to seek shelter. I could not outrun my captors and was promptly arrested. I realized that the special branch had caught up with me. They continuously enquired as to where Tsietse Mashinini, Biekie and Elsa were as they had been looking for me for a long time.

JOHN VORSTER SQUARE

- 9 I spent a week at John Vorster Square in detention on the third floor. After a week I was then moved to the second floor where detainees were held. Nothing eventful

occurred except that police officers would come, stare at me and then leave. I had just the clothing that I had been arrested in, on my body.

- 10 On the second floor, females were detained in individual cells. I was detained in cell number 136. Joyce Dipale, Baby Tshawe and Nana Sabela were also detained on the second floor. At night, we communicated using the window as an avenue to communicate by standing close to the windows and allowing the echo to carry through. During interrogation, the interrogators would leave the pen. We would take the pen and write messages on toilet paper. In each cell, there was a thin mat, two blankets, one which was used to make a pillow by folding it. Food consisted of two slices of bread and tea. Lunch consisted of a mug of soup, bread. Evenings we were served a container with rice or some soup. The cells were controlled by a short Afrikaner policeman named Cilliers. There was another colored policeman by the name of Mcpherson who lived in an around the Alexander area and later in an around the Klipspruit area. There was one Jan Visser who detained me. He was colored. There were many policemen involved from different areas. They never introduced themselves to me because it was not my business to know them .

INTERROGATION

- 11 My interrogation began in the second week of my detention. I was taken to the tenth floor to a Captain Cronwright. I recall there was a Captain Mogoro who was present as well. There was a stage when a black policeman by the name of Nyampule escorted me for interrogation. On the tenth floor I was taken to an office where there were white policemen. The offices were divided by a glass that allowed you to see the outlines of people in the next office. I was handcuffed when removed from the second floor. I remained handcuffed until I was taken to the tenth floor. My interrogators always worked in teams. I was repeatedly banged against the wall, pinched, and electrocuted. I was given a piece of paper, a red pen and a blue pen and told to write down everything about myself, who my friends were, what I had done etc. Often I was taunted and asked where was Mandela now, and whether he was going to help me. I would be asked repeatedly as to who I thought I was, where the people they were looking for were, and where did I take them too. I recall that I had asked to be taken to the toilet. This was refused and I urinated on myself. In my view, water was used as a weapon. I felt extremely humiliated in have lost control of my bladder in the presence of my interrogators. The first day I was made to stand for 5 hours and then taken back to the cells.

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12 I was taught that when we were arrested, we must stay on the denial for as long as possible. The idea was that it would give the people that were our comrades time to flee. We would hold on for as long as we could. The first day shift of interrogation was exhausting. I was given no food, or water. I was hungry and miserable. I remained scared all the time. The sight of these big white policemen hurling abuse at me scared me. There was this huge white policeman who spoke fluently in Sotho. He would speak softly to me and tell me: "These people will kill you, tell me the truth, I can help you, who sent you?"

13 There were many a time when I was told by the policemen that I should peep from the window and that if they threw me down I would die like a fly.

ELECTROCUTION

14 The next day I was taken back to tenth floor. This time I was cuffed around my legs and made to kneel down. I had been allowed to wear earrings. I recall that a wet towel was place on me and using the electricity which ran from a cassette, I was electrocuted. No one remained in the room as this happened. I screamed when they turned on the switch. I passed out. They told me that they could turn it off if I told the truth. They could stop with the interrogation if I told them the truth. The shocks administered brought on a sudden menstrual cycle and I bled all over myself and the floor. I was told to "lick" it up because it had come from my body. I was then given a mop and told to clean it up. I was then taken back to the cells. There was drinking water that had been kept at the cells in a bottle. This was removed from my cell. I had no face cloth and had to use the toilet water to wash myself. I was then left alone for two days.

THE VAAL

15 One night I was fetched in the early hours of the morning. I was grabbed and removed from the cell. The members of the security branch opened the cell and I was taken to the Vaal dam. I was placed in a sack. The top of the sack was then secured. I was then thrown into shallow water and made to sit in that water. I must have spent at least three hours in the water. I was then brought back to the cells before my absence was noticed. Mcpherson would know that you were out and would ask if I was okay. There was a white female matron who would be present during the day. Nyampule would take me

back to my cell. I would tell him that I was not well. That I did not want to bathe. Once I had recovered I would be taken to shower. Whilst I was at John Vorster Square, I heard that Steve Biko had died.

- 16 On an occasion I was taken to the district surgeon and prescribed a spray. The spray stayed with the police officers. I did not have any visitors and neither did my parents visit. I never saw a magistrate whilst I was in detention. I was detained without trial from 1977 until 1981 for contravention of section 6 of the Terrorism Act. In September 1979 I was removed to Fort prison at Constitutional Hill. Between 1977 and 1979 I was removed at least once a week for interrogation. Sometimes it was twice a week. This was just to remind you to tell the truth. They would tell me that once I told the truth I would be let go. I was taunted daily that I had killed Ester. Ester was Thabo Mnisi's sister who had travelled to Botswana with her boyfriend. When she returned, she was ill. They used to say both I and the ANC had killed Ester.

THE FORT PRISON

- 17 Joyce Dipale and Baby joined me later at the Fort Prison. As did Thenjiwe Mtintso, Rebecca Mnisi and Mama Ellen Khuzwayo. Strangely they allowed only odd numbers of people in the cell for example three or five women one cell. There were good warders and bad warders. White wardens never helped. Often food would be thrown over the walls. An reasonable black warder would look the other way when we fetch our clothes and in the process retrieve food thrown over the walls. I was released in February 1981. The special branch police simply came and signed the papers and I was told to go. I walked from the Fort Prison to Noord. I later jointed Khotso house in Bramfontein where I met Sophie Mazibuko earning R120 a month. I also met Mrs Barbara Manthata. From 1981 until 1990 I participated in the Save Alexandra Party under Rev Buti as well as SANCO and the Alex renewal project. Later I met the president of South African churches of council where we formed a Help save Alexandra Party.

HARASSMENT

- 18 Harassment by the special branch continued even after my detention, torture and release. On many occasions they would pick me up, interrogate me and then let me go. Interrogation was always at John Vorster Square. The community in which I lived

John G.F.

would cautiously accept me. People were always weary of my political views and because of the fact that I was constantly watched and harassed, I was not happily accepted.

That is all that I wish to state.

I know and understand the contents of this declaration.

I have no objection to taking the prescribed oath.

I consider the prescribed oath as binding on my conscience.

Abraham

DEPONENT

Thus signed and sworn to at JHB on 2020-02-11

The Deponent having knowledge that he knows and understands the contents of this affidavits, that it is both true and correct to the best of his knowledge and belief, that he has no objection to taking the prescribed oath and that the prescribed oath would be binding on his conscience.

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