

IN THE HIGH COURT OF SOUTH AFRICA
EASTERN CAPE DIVISION, GQEBERHA

CASE NO: CC19/24

***IN RE: THE REOPENED INQUEST INTO THE DEATHS OF MATTHEW GONIWE,
FORT CALATA, SICELO MHLAULI AND SPARROW MKHONTO***

WITNESS STATEMENT

I, the undersigned

SAMUEL JOHANNES DE BEER

do hereby make oath and state that:

1. I am an adult male and a pensioner, currently residing at 116 Sixth Street, Linden.
2. The facts contained herein are, unless otherwise indicated, within my personal knowledge and are true and correct.

INTRODUCTION

3. On or about 7 August 2024, a subpoena was served on me to attend an inquest regarding the deaths of Matthew Goniwe; Fort Calata; Sicelo Mhlauli; and Sparrow Mkhonto ("Cradock Four"), in the above Honourable Court from 2 – 24 September 2024.

4. I was excused from attending on those dates and agreed to now testify during the October 2025 hearing.

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

5. This statement deals with my knowledge of Mr. Matthew Goniwe (“Mr. Goniwe”), particularly in relation to his role in Cradock, the circumstances surrounding his removal from the teaching post, and the efforts undertaken to facilitate his reinstatement prior to his death.
6. I do not have any personal knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Goniwe or the persons who were killed with him.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

7. I was born on 19 August 1944 in Rivonia, Gauteng. I matriculated from Helpmekaar College in Johannesburg and subsequently obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in theology from the University of Pretoria.
8. I served as a Minister of Religion for five years in Springs before entering public service. In 1974, I became a member of Parliament and in 1984, I was appointed Deputy Minister of Education and Development Aid. I held this position for five years (1984 to 1989). From 1989 to 1991 I served as, *inter alia*, Minister of Housing and Minister of Health. I was also the Minister of Education and Training from 1992 to 1994.
9. I served as a Member of Parliament from 1994 to 2000. In 2000, I was appointed to the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, where I served as a member of the African National Congress (“ANC”) and as the Chairperson of the Oversight Committee of the Premier of Gauteng. I remained in this position until my retirement in 2013.

POLITICAL UNREST AND SCHOOL BOYCOTTS

10. My appointment as Deputy Minister in 1984 coincided with a period of heightened political unrest in the Republic of South Africa ("RSA"), particularly within the education sector. I was tasked with overseeing matters relating to "black education", which at the time had become a central point of resistance against the apartheid government.
11. During this period, widespread School Boycotts occurred across the RSA. These boycotts were driven by, *inter alia*, inadequate facilities, authoritarian disciplinary practices, language policies, and broader opposition to the apartheid regime. These protests became increasingly politicised ("the movement").
12. Cradock, in the Eastern Cape, became a focal point of nationwide unrest during the 1980s.
13. At the centre of the movement, in Cradock, was Mr. Goniwe, a respected mathematics teacher at the local school and prominent community leader, who played a pivotal role in organising local resistance, advocating for educational reform, and promoting community self-determination in the face of apartheid.
14. As I understand it at the time, due to his influence in Cradock, Mr. Goniwe was deemed a threat by security forces and the State Security Council ("the SSC"). Although I have no firsthand knowledge of the process of chain of command, Mr. Goniwe was removed from his teaching position in Cradock by the Department of Education and Training ("DET") and relocated to Graaff-Reinet, as I understand it, on the instructions of the SSC. This decision provoked significant unrest and widespread protest in the Cradock region.
15. The removal of Mr. Goniwe from his teaching position in Cradock occurred prior to my appointment as Deputy Minister of Education and Training in September 1984.

The decision to transfer him was taken under the tenure of the then Minister of Education and Training.

16. Following my appointment, the ongoing unrest in Cradock arising, *inter alia*, from Mr. Goniwe's removal, prompted me to conduct further inquiries into the matter.

INVESTIGATIONS: SCHOOL BOYCOTT

17. I travelled to Cradock on several occasions to engage directly with community leaders and to convene meetings aimed at fostering dialogue between government officials and residents. These engagements included meetings with parents, local leaders and educators, during which I tried to establish the reason for the heightened political unrest in Cradock. During these visits, I expressed support for broader improvements to educational and living conditions in the Lingelilhe Township.

18. I did not personally meet Mr. Goniwe during any of my visits to Cradock, as at the time, I had no reason to.

19. It later became apparent, however, from my interactions with community representatives, that Mr. Goniwe was an extremely influential figure. As a result, one of my departmental representatives, Mr. Jaap Strydom, met with Mr. Goniwe personally. Mr. Goniwe expressed his desire to conduct further discussions.

20. I subsequently invited representatives of the Cradock Residents' Association (CRADORA), an organisation led by Mr. Goniwe, to Cape Town to initiate further discussions regarding the situation in Cradock.

21. In or about April 1985, I met with representatives of CRADORA, without Mr. Goniwe. It became evident that, in order to restore peace in Cradock and bring an end to the school boycotts, Mr. Goniwe needed to be reinstated to his teaching position.

22. The representatives of CRADORA expressed the firm view that Mr. Goniwe commanded the respect and trust of the local community and that his reinstatement would be instrumental in restoring discipline among learners and re-establishing order within the town.
23. At that time, public meetings were prohibited in the RSA. I, however, obtained special authorisation for a public meeting to be held in Cradock, the purpose of which was to promote dialogue and to encourage the return of the learners to the classroom.
24. Mr. Goniwe facilitated this public meeting in April 1985, and on 15 April 1985, the learners returned to school, effectively bringing an end to the school boycotts in Cradock – an event that marked a significant milestone in the broader struggle for stability and educational reform in South Africa.

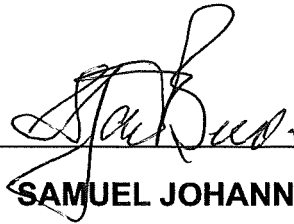
INVESTIGATIONS: MR. GONIWE REINSTATEMENT

25. Whilst the abovementioned efforts were being made to restore peace in Cradock and bring an end to the school boycotts, parallel discussions were taking place between representatives of the DET and SSC regarding Mr. Goniwe's reinstatement.
26. The DET and the SSC held conflicting views regarding the reinstatement of Mr. Goniwe.
27. On or about 30 May 1985, during a meeting convened between the SSC and representatives of the DET, the SSC made it clear that Mr. Goniwe would not be reinstated under any circumstances.

28. However, at a subsequent meeting held on 6 June 1985, the issue of reinstatement was revisited, and it was ultimately agreed that Mr. Goniwe would be reinstated unconditionally. I did not attend these meetings.
29. Despite this agreement, the reinstatement process was subject to further delays by the SSC.
30. In order to avoid further delays, I sought confirmation of the reinstatement decision from Cabinet.
31. Therefore, I convened an informal meeting in Pretoria with the Minister of Law and Order, Mr. Louis le Grange; the Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan; the Minister of Education and Training, Dr. Gerrit Viljoen; and the Commissioner of Police, General Johan Coetzee. During this meeting, all present agreed that Mr. Goniwe should be reinstated in his post in Cradock. I am not sure of the dates of these meetings, but as far as I can remember, it was a week or two before the killing of the Cradock Four.
32. General Coetzee requested a brief postponement to allow the police to make the necessary administrative arrangements prior to Mr. Goniwe's reinstatement. I was not sure what the administrative arrangements were, but despite my subsequent follow-ups, no further progress was communicated to me.
33. I contacted General Coetzee a few times to obtain a progress report, but he repeatedly advised me to be patient.
34. Shortly after the informal meetings referred to hereinbefore, on 27 June 1985, Mr. Goniwe, together with Messrs. Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkhonto, and Sicelo Mhlauli were killed.
35. I was later informed that the killings of the Cradock Four were attributed to tensions between AZAPO and the UDF at the time.

CONCLUSION

36. The deaths of the Cradock Four were deeply shocking to me, particularly given Mr. Goniwe's significant and positive influence as a leader and educator within the Cradock community.
37. I remain available to assist the Honourable Court further, should clarification or elaboration be required on any aspect of this statement.



SAMUEL JOHANNES DE BEER

I certify that the abovenamed Deponent has acknowledged that he knows and understands the contents of this Affidavit which was signed and sworn to before me at _____ on this ____ day of October 2025 and that the provisions of the Regulation contained in Government Notice R2477 of 16 November 1984, as amended, have been complied with.



 Ex Officio COMMISSIONER OF OATHS (RSA)

Steven Bayne

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COMMISSIONER OF OATHS