

11 May 2018

South Africa: Threats to the safety of human rights defender, Thabiso Zulu

Human rights defender **Thabiso Zulu** continues to be subjected to intimidation and threats. His human rights work has long caused hostile reactions from those he has exposed for corruption, but the wave of threats and intimidation escalated late last year after he spoke at the memorial service of a friend who had been brutally murdered for exposing corruption, and after he gave evidence to the Moerane Commission of Inquiry, which had been tasked with investigating political killings.

[Thabiso Zulu](#) is an independent human rights defender and former African National Council (ANC) youth leader who has been speaking out against government corruption in South Africa since 2010. He has worked on issues relating to fraud and corruption in various South African municipalities and government departments; there has been at least two convictions (of councilors) and a number of other arrests including that of a former municipal manager and former mayor as a result of his work.

On the evening of Sunday 6 May Thabiso Zulu returned to his residence on foot. Aware of the possibility of being monitored, he re-entered via a different gate than he had exited earlier that evening. It was dusk and right after entering the yard he saw a light coming from the street. When he looked out he saw an unfamiliar car with three men inside. When they saw him, the car immediately left at high speed. The human rights defender believes the men were there to harm him, but were thrown off by how he entered.

In February, the human rights defender received a phone call from a police intelligence officer. He had been intending to go to a wedding but, despite having not apprised anyone of his intentions to go, he was advised not to attend. The officer told him that the police had information that he would be killed if he went. Thabiso Zulu had previously been told by a councilor in the municipality of Richmond in KwaZulu-Natal that he should “watch his back”.

The threats and intimidation began shortly after Thabiso Zulu spoke at the memorial service of his late friend Sindiso Magaqa, who had exposed and denounced corruption in Umzimkhulu Municipality. The human rights defender spoke of the weakness of the police force, denounced its failure to quash corruption, and revealed that Sindiso Magaqa had been the source of the documents proving corruption in the municipality of Umzimkhulu.

It further escalated after he gave evidence to the Moerane Commission of Inquiry, which had been tasked with investigating political killings that have occurred in the province of KwaZulu-Natal since 2011. At the inquiry, he openly exposed several instances of corruption, including that which led to Sindiso Magaqa’s murder.

In 2012 Thabiso Zulu was beaten by police after attempting to stop police brutality and destruction of property. He ended up having to leave his home to try to protect his family, who were also being intimidated and threatened as a result of his human rights work.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned for the safety of Thabiso Zulu and believes he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate activities in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in South Africa to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and intimidation against Thabiso Zulu with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Thabiso Zulu.

