

**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

**HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

**SUBMISSIONS - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**DATE: 02.05.96 NAME: CATHERINE MLANGENI**

**SEPATI MLANGENI**

**CASE: GO\0195 - JOHANNESBURG**

**DAY 3**

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DR BORAINÉ: Before we call the next witness there are a few people we would like to greet, and as I indicated earlier, I'd be very grateful if you would stand just for a moment when I call your names so that we can identify you either up there or down below on to the right, on to the left. Mrs Dos Santos from Mocambique, we're very glad to see you, Mrs Katalia, thank you very much, you're very welcome. Ann Burroughs, has she gone already, sorry about that, and Ricco Hudson (Hartson). Thank you very much indeed.

We invite Mrs Catherine Mlangeni and Mrs Sepati Mlangeni to the witness stand please. You are the mother and you are the wife of Bheki Mlangeni and you are both coming to give evidence before the Commission, is that correct? Let me welcome you both very warmly this afternoon, we are very pleased to see you, many of us remember very well what happened to Bheki and it's a very sad story that you have to tell and I know it's not easy but I hope that you will feel that you are amongst friends, that all we want you to tell is the story as you know it, but before you can do that I must ask you please stand, first Mrs Catherine Mlangeni for the oath please?

CATHERINE MLANGENI: (sworn states)

SEPATI MLANGENI: (sworn states)

DR BORAINÉ: Thank you very much. We will be starting with you Mrs Catherine Mlangeni, the mother of Bheki and my colleague Ms Jasmin Sooka is going to lead you as you tell your story.

MS SOOKA: Hello Mama, hello Sepati, I greet you but before I ask you to tell your story, I just want to give a little bit of the background about Bheki. On the 17th of November 1989, prompted by the death row confessions of Butana Almond Nofemela, former police captain Johannes Dirk Coetzee made his own series of revelations about his activities as the commander of the SAP's Death Squad. Following these confessions, CCB members were arrested and detained and F W de Klerk responded to public outcry, and on the 5th of March 1990, the Harms Commission of Inquiry began hearing testimony. Dirk Coetzee gave key testimony to this Commission. Fearing for his life following the Harms Commission, Dirk Coetzee fled to Lusaka. In May 1990 a walkman cassette player with an explosive device contained in the headphones was sent to Coetzee in Zambia. Coetzee never received the parcel and in February 1990 it was returned to the sender Bheki Mlangeni of the firm Cheadles, Thompson and Hayson. Mama I'd like you to tell us about Bheki's life please, in your own words. Please if you feel that you want to stop for a while, let me know, it's your moment.

MRS MLANGENI: I am Bheki Mlangeni's mother. He was born on December the 28th, 1958 at Jabulani. Bheki Mlangeni was my fourth child. One day he told me that he had applied for a job with Cheadles, Thompson and Hayson. One day he called me and he said **Mom, I'm going to be in work that's going to be a misery in my life**, and he said he was in the Harms Commission and there was another side which was called the askari. That was the time when I started seeing that he was not happy at all. All these things happened while he worked. He wanted to get married and I said to him, yes if he thought that he was old enough to get married, he can. I asked him why he doesn't stop working because it is clear that he was unhappy and

I reminded him that he knew how poor we were at home and pinned our hopes on him for survival. But he said that there was nothing that he could do because he had been living to help people for his entire life and our people have been tortured. I pressured him to leave his job but he refused as it was the work that he wanted to do, to work with people.

We led a very low life at home being poor, uneducated and unemployed, earning R3,00 but I prayed to God to help me with my children's education as this would help me to live luxuriously. Bheki promised me that he would receive education and take us out of this poverty. His older brother didn't study because, seeing we couldn't earn more than R5,00 he asked my permission for him to stop studying to go and earn some income in order to help educate the younger siblings.

We together agreed with his older brother, Bheki went to study and we helped each other with the finances. Bheki was brilliant and conscientious, he would ask things that we could never answer and he assured me that we would one day rise out of this state of poverty and become very wealthy. He went on studying and in his letters to me he would sometimes tell me about the people out there who were really hurt, people that he wanted to help. When I asked how he proposed to help them he responded that he wanted to be a lawyer for human rights. Well he managed to become a lawyer.

While he was in Form 1 he went to Mondhlo where he fell in love with a girl called Norazi and she gave birth. That I accepted, as according to our tradition, if a son has a child with another person's he has to go and pay. I refused to let him leave school and vowed to try by all means and did my best not to take him out of school. While things were on that note, in 1978 Bheki met another girl at Khatlehong called Diogo. I asked where he was heading to and he replied that he didn't know. I was really amazed.

He left to go and study in Durban where another child called Xolani was born. Now he had three children.

After this I told him that I was tired of him and I insisted that he got married. In 1986 he met Sepati and in that year they had their first children, his fourth by now. He was very caring for his children not even minding to wash his daughter's underwear.

He told me that he was now working with the askaris and that one day he met Dirk Coetzee and went to get some statement.....(end of Side A of tape 16)

(continued on side B but gap in the recording) ....got hold of him and he clearly indicated to me how the procedures went. During those days he applied for study leave in order to carry on with his studies in this field of law.

A telephone call arrived on a Wednesday while he was studying and he was told that the caller had asked where he was and that he had to come but he had refused as he was busy studying and didn't have time. The caller started shouting to the people at home telling them to chase Bheki to hurry up and he told us to tell the caller that he was not there. I asked him why he was not receiving these extraordinary calls. This particular call was about a parcel that he had to go and fetch from his place of employment.

There was another call from his office where Harris said he must come and help and help set the dates for all the child cases on Monday and that's when he left to go to the office but on Thursday before he did this, he asked me to cook supper so that we could eat together around the table as a family. After that he took the cake which had not yet been cut and I shouted why he cut this cake before going to his wife's family who were supposed to share this cake with us. He insisted that he was cutting it and I wondered what was so important about cutting the cake then. His face looked very worried, he wasn't the same Bheki that I knew.

On Friday when I was at work he got a telephone call from his office and he went there very smartly dressed on that day. He stood before his other siblings...(witness very upset)

MS SOOKA: Mama take your time.

MRS MLANGENI: He asked them how he looked and they affirmed that he looked very smart. He left for work and I heard that after he had done what he had been called for, he took the parcel and put it in the back and phoned his wife to come and they would go and watch a movie. After the movie, when they returned home, they went to their room.

I was very sick at that time and did not even know what I was suffering from. I saw my daughter-in-law rushing in and just said, Bheki. I asked her what was wrong with him but she just said, **Mama, Bheki at the garage!** I was surprised wondering what this garage story was about, and couldn't hear anything, feeling very ill. When I came out they held me and asked me please not to go into there. I just skipped through their legs and went in. I found Bheki in pieces, bits of him on the curtains, pieces of him and his brains all over. That was the end of Bheki.

But another thing there at home, we are all sick, angry and unhappy people. Nobody is working, we're suffering.

MS SOOKA: Mama, thank you for telling us your story. I want to ask you a few questions if you don't mind. How many children do you have?

MRS MLANGENI: I had five children, Bheki has gone, there are four of them, they're all married and they have got their own houses. There are only two who are staying with me who are not working.

MS SOOKA: Mama who supported Bheki when he went to university?

MR LUKHELE: Me.

MRS MLANGENI: ... (indistinct) the three children that Bheki had.

MRS MLANGENI: The main thing that I'm worried about, because these children used to come to us for money that I did not have, to such an extent that when I see them I just feel like running away and hiding myself because I know they are coming to request for financial assistance and I don't have it. These children's mothers are married and they are living with their grandmothers, just grannies like me living on pensions.

MS SOOKA: Sepati, can I ask you to tell us about your life with Bheki and about what actually happened because you were with Bheki when the headphones exploded.

MRS S MLANGENI: I met Bheki in 1984. There was something at the amphitheatre, Bishop Tutu was receiving his Nobel Peace Prize. Because he was very active in these things we went together with him and we decided to go to the amphitheatre, that's where I first met him. After having a child with him we fell in love and it led to our marriage. We were just boyfriend and girlfriend, there was an age difference between the two of us. He was a bit older than me and he had knowledge and was involved in school activities and in an organisation that was taking place in the township. I received a lot of information and knowledge from him because he was quite clear. During that time I can say I was ignorant. I knew exactly what was happening, I knew the organisation Sofasonke but I wasn't clear about anything. He was explaining to us in details the issue of Sin... (indistinct), the boycotters and he indicated to me how they got involved in politics. That's where I realised that he knew exactly what he was doing and he told me that before one became a comrade one started first by boycotting.

People see things, they get hurt and they get evicted from their houses and they see dirty children in the streets, that's where the practice of boycotting started.

Well we went on in our relationship. He was now studying at Wits. We were in love and he was detained in 1985. I was pregnant at that time. As I've already said, I didn't understand quite well what was happening. He arrived on a Sunday evening and he said to me that the police were after him and that it might happen that we would be arrested and that he would see me on Monday if we were lucky but in the event of being arrested he would leave everything with his mother. He told me that he would bring money since I was pregnant at that time.

I received a message from my mom that Bheki had been detained. My parents were already Christians and did not believe anything about politics. They wanted me to leave Bheki, and did not quite grasp what was happening. In this detention we had problems because I couldn't see him as we were not yet married at that time and I couldn't be regarded as his fiancée. He eventually made applications and arranged it so that I managed to see him at Sun City. I gave birth while he was still in jail.

He managed through the DPSC to organise that my child should get a grant. My mother used to fetch the moneys from the grant and after a year he was released and I had a hope that we were going to lead a normal life. In June there was a state of emergency and they had to run away. I was going out with a person who was not settled and I couldn't maintain myself. He said to me that he was going to skip the country but he would try to arrange everything and I must say that he was a provider in everything. He knew that I was his girlfriend and he always gave me something to help and maintain the child.

After his release I went to study at Wits University where on my arrival I did not have examination pads or books, but he used to buy me books from the money that he received as a bursary. He used to show me that it was more than love, he was like a brother and a friend to me. He used to explain to me how university life was and he said to me that I shouldn't just rush into it, the most important thing was to study and look back to where I came from. I was from a very poor family just as much as

he was, I got married to a poor man in 1990 on the 9th and at our wedding he paid labola in February and March and when he finished paying it, he was staying with his mother and I was also staying at my parents' home, until we got married. Even when we got married things were a bit confused. He said that it was such a long time since he had paid labola, but I didn't want to stay with him until I got married so we just made an informal thing and got married, and then there was a wedding celebration.

After marriage I stayed with Bheki for two months feeling very happy for having got married and was looking forward to being a married woman like other married women after having suffered for a long time and the person that I had loved for all these years was not settled, because after the organisations were unbanned, I thought everything will now be over.

This thing continued, I thought the political struggle would be over but he continued. There was no civic in Jabulani and he started the civic there. He started the ANC there where there was nothing before that and he became the organisation's chairperson. With regard to school issues there was a branch called the SOWETO Coordinating Committee, and Bheki was one of the founders. In everything he did he did not do for personal gain but for the benefit of the community.

MS SOOKA: It's very clear that Bheki spent most of his life in Civic and community activities, but could you tell us a bit about what actually happened to him and the time when he was part of the investigation and part of the Harms Commission? Did he tell you anything about the work he was doing?

MRS S MLANGENI: Yes he did tell me about what he was doing. Although I didn't understand how things were linking up, during that time I was doing articles, he said there was somebody who had revealed about all the atrocities against the people and during that Harms Commission when they tried to investigate and find out

the truth of what had actually happened about those people who died mysteriously.

MS SOOKA: ... (indistinct) completed your university education?

MRS S MLANGENI: I didn't finish my studies at university.

MS SOOKA: ... (indistinct) the day that you received the parcel from London?

MRS S MLANGENI: I was at work during that time, it was about half past three in the afternoon, I got a call, he was on study leave as he was going to write some examination and he phoned and he asked why I was at work when I was supposed to be at home. I replied that I had gone to sort something out at work and he requested me that we should meet at Carlton Centre that afternoon because there was a movie which he wanted us to see. He found me waiting for him at Carlton Centre, we went inside and we saw the movie, the Reversal of Fortunes, where they were they were showing how lawyers were arguing and all those kind of lettered things, but he just wanted to check out because the main character there wanted to kill the wife. He wanted to see the argument and the whole plot in court and to see if that character would be arrested.

From there we went to a tea room where we sat down and he took out this parcel which had almost been unwrapped and there was a small box with cassettes, on one of which was written, **Evidence, Hit Squad**. He said he had received this parcel and one might see that there was no evidence here that they are talking about, probably nothing in the cassette. We then went home in a taxi. When we arrived there, he didn't even stay, I was undressing, as he connected the earphones ..... (witness very upset)

MS SOOKA: Take your time.

MRS S MLANGENI: I saw him connecting these earphones, he didn't hear me because the last thing I said to him was

why didn't he connect it to the hi-fi, so that I could also listen. I don't even think he even heard a thing of what happened, what was in the cassette, within seconds I heard a big explosion, a big noise, I thought it was a gun. I ran away, I tried to get out of the window and then I couldn't get out of the window and I came through the door and the last thing I saw was him falling down slowly... (witness very upset)

MS SOOKA: Sepati do you want to rest a while, or do you feel you can carry on?

MRS S MLANGENI: When I ran away I ran inside the main house and I was calling out. When I went to mum's room I don't know if I found her asleep because I was just shouting, I just said he was in the garage, in the garage and I started running away and one gentleman held me and I ran back home and police were there looking for a statement, I just saw two ambulances and I began to hope. I was confused, I thought he was also in one of those ambulances, when I went inside..... (witness upset)

MS SOOKA: Stop for a while.

DR BORAINÉ: Mrs Sepati I think it might be a good idea for you to just spend a few minutes, there's no hurry, don't even think of starting, just sit quietly for a while.

MS SOOKA: Sepati, why don't you go and have a cup of tea in the meantime and we can take you back after tea? Rather take some time for yourself, okay? I think we'll take a tea break and we'll come back in fifteen minutes.

Sepati, I'm not going to ask you to go over what happened because I think it's very very painful for you, but you've come to the Commission to tell your story and we'd like to hear from you about what you want the Commission to do for you.

MRS S MLANGENI: With regard to my issue, the person who did this has been found. I want this person to come out,

and this person is already on trial, it's Eugene de Kock, what I'd like the Commission to find out from him, I'm not clear how Bheki's name got involved as a sender into the parcel.

Another thing that's not clear in my mind, when they sent this parcel to Dirk Coetzee as it was Eugene who claims it was in order to kill Dirk Coetzee who was an expert in making bombs, when we read about letter bombs, how could he have sent Dirk Coetzee a parcel bomb, as clever as he is, an expert, didn't he know that this thing could come back to Bheki? What I do want to find out, how did they get Bheki's name involved in this.

Other issues that I have been getting from newspapers is that Eugene de Kock says he's going to ask amnesty from you. I contest this. Eugene, when he did what he did, he knew that somebody would die. Today I'm a widow, I'm an outcast in our society because I'm a widow. In our community and our society you are associated with all sorts of things when you are a widow because of a person who didn't think through when they were doing this, so that when this person comes to you to ask for amnesty, how do you forgive such a person? If I can find an answer to this question, how do you go about forgiving this person who is a cruel murderer, who killed a defenceless person who'd never killed anyone, to a person who'd never raped anyone, a person who never committed any crime, who was just fighting for peoples' rights but without carrying a gun? I would love the Commission to assist me there.

MS SOOKA: I want to say to you that it is true that people apply for amnesty.....(end of tape 16)

(start of tape 17 but a gap in the recording)...for telling us your story, and I thank you for the courage with which you sit here and tell it as well. Mama Mlangeni I'd like to come to you now please, would you tell us what you'd like to have from the Commission please?

MRS MLANGENI: I would also like to request the Commission to find out from this guy who committed this deed, what his intention was, what had Bheki done to him? Because now he's created so many orphans in this country, why, why did he do such a thing? Bheki had children all over but he loved them and took care of his children. If the Commission could find out from him what is he going to do about these orphans that are all over because of him?

CHAIRPERSON: I don't know if there are still any of my colleagues will ask questions but I think they said no. There are no words we could say to you, when we try to console you it just sounds like hollow words from people who didn't incur this suffering, but I do hope that you know, you saw his funeral, even the way when people heard about this issue they were really touched by this, many many people, even those who did not know him, who had not seen him personally, many people suffered and felt this pain, maybe this can help in putting oil on your wounds.

We know to you it's a nightmare, because if you think back you ask yourself why you didn't stay longer at the bus stop and why did you go to work, because if you had not gone to work, as a person who was studying, he would not have gotten that parcel, but we are all saying those things after such things have happened. This Commission is a Commission that says our people here in South Africa, all of us must remember the atrocities that happened with an intention of working towards seeing that these things never ever have to happen again so that children are made orphans after only two months of marriage and make widows of people, so that these things never happen again in this country, for those people who fought for this country so that change comes about.

We do not have words to console you but as you saw, it was as if there was nobody inside this house as because they were listening, As the English says, you could even hear a pin drop because people were very pained. May God bless you. May God strengthen you! Siabonga.