

# Media Statement



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**TO: ALL MEDIA**

**DATE: 25 JUNE 2019**

**RE: RACKETEERING GANG SENTENCED TO LIFE PLUS 45 YEARS**

On 07 June 2019, the Mthatha High Court sentenced six gang members to three life terms and an additional 45 years, after they were convicted on 40 counts, including racketeering, murder, attempted murder, robbery circumstances with aggravating circumstances, unlawful possession of firearms and escaping from lawful custody.

The court found that Zwelithini Gibeni (30), Menzi Zekani (27), Sonwabile Makhonco (31), Ntlantla Mvoko (28), Welcome Mfiki (30) and Sinethemba Dangazela (30) conducted an enterprise through the pattern of racketeering activities, which resulted in a series of violent robberies committed around the former Transkei region in the period between 23 November 2011 and 25 July 2012.

The court sentenced the criminals to life terms on each of three charges of murder and 15 years on all the other 37 charges, but it ordered some sentences to run concurrently.

During their reign of terror, the gang was responsible for armed business robberies in Tsolo, Ngqamakhwe, Butterworth, Engcobo, Mthatha and Ngqeleni. Gibeni, Zekani, Makhonco and Mvoko were the original members of the gang and committed the first robberies in at least four business premises in Tsolo in November 2011, after which they were arrested. While in custody, they were linked to a business robbery committed days earlier in Ngqamakhwe.

While being transported from Ngqamakhwe court back to Mthatha's Wellington Maximum Correctional Centre, the four managed to overpower police officials, robbed them of their pistols, a rifle and bulletproof vests, and made off in a marked SAPS vehicle. With the vehicle's siren on, the gang forced to a stop a motorist, Nombongo Ngwenya, in an attempt to hijack her vehicle. When she did not stop, they shot and killed her. On the same spot, they robbed another motorist of his Audi A4.

While on the run from police, the four recruited Mfiki and Dangazela into their gang and committed more robberies. On their last robbery at Zinduneni village near Ngqeleni, there was a shootout with the police resulting in the death of Warrant Officer Mawethu Siganga, and their accomplice Chuma Sithole.

During the marathon trial, Senior State Advocate Mduduzi Mzila led evidence of more than 100 witnesses leading to the gang's conviction as charged.

Passing the sentence, Judge Shylock Ndengezi described the gang as extremely dangerous people who had no regard for the law or consequences of their actions. "You were at war with the society at large, and the community lived in fear because no one knew when you would strike next as you were terrorising communities all over the Eastern Cape," said Judge Ndengezi.

The NPA welcomes the sentence and the Director of Public Prosecutions in the Mthatha Division, Barry Madolo commends Advocate Mzila and the investigating team for their tenacity in ensuring that justice is served.

Kind Regards,

**Luxolo Tyali**

**Regional Spokesperson: DPP Mthatha**

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