

# DAILY MAVERICK

## Place of Weeping

**'We will die here' – fearful eKhenana residents resolute on eve of funeral for slain Abahlali land activist**



*Residents of eKhenana informal settlement near Durban live in fear as killings continue, 09 May 2022. (Photo:Phumlani Thabethe)*

[Chris Makhaye](#), *Daily Maverick*

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Before Abahlali BaseMjondolo leaders Nokuthula Mabaso and Ayanda Ngila were killed, eKhenana had been envisioned as a 'land of milk and honey'. Today, residents say it is a 'Place of Weeping' where blood is constantly spilled.

### [BeyondWords](#)

Nokuthula Mabaso (40) will be laid to rest on Saturday at eSidumbini village, near Tongaat, about 25km north of Durban.

The latest victim of the low-intensity civil war waged over the eKhenana informal settlement, near the Mayville shantytown, Mabaso was Abahlali BaseMjondolo's women's branch leader in eKhenana. Eyewitnesses said she was at a branch meeting in the main hall on Thursday evening, 5 May 2022. She left the meeting at about 7.30pm to tend to her pots when she was ambushed by two men in front of

her one-room shack. They opened fire, hitting her four times in the back, then once each in the stomach and breast.

The attackers fled into the night and they are still at large.

Two of Mabaso's three children – who are between 17 and four year old – were sleeping inside the shack. She drew her last breath in the presence of fellow Abahlali members, who had been with her in the meeting only seconds earlier.



A community hall named after another murdered activist, Nokuthula Ndlovu, in eKhenana near Durban. This is where Abahlali BaseMjondolo holds meetings. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

Mabaso was one of the people who had witnessed, on 8 March 2022, the brutal killing of Ayanda Ngila, who was shot in broad daylight by four heavily armed men. No arrests have been made for Ngila's murder despite the fact that all four attackers known locally are said to be close to the ANC ringleader in the area.



A bed and pots inside the shack where Nokuthula Mabaso was living before she was murdered in the Khenana informal settlement. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

### **'Targeted'**

Ekhenana – which is home to about 100 poor families – was supposed to be a land of milk and honey, where no harm ever occurs. It had a communal garden, poultry project, kitchen and shop, and residents pooled together to ensure no family went to bed without food and no child went to school on an empty stomach.

But it has become a Place of Weeping, where blood is spilled constantly.

The garden, once green with vegetable and corn, now lies fallow after prominent Abahlali members were attacked, arrested and killed.

Ngila and Mabaso were prominent members of the community and played a critical role in the development of communal projects.

Ekhenana residents and Abahlali BaseMjondolo contend that key members of the community are targeted so that the place becomes run-down and made into a shack-farming project to benefit certain individuals close to the ANC.



Ekhenana informal settlement residents near Durban gather around a fireplace at night. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

They accuse the local Cato Manor police of working in concert with the killers, reluctant to investigate the killing of Abahlali members and leaders and quick to arrest members of the organisation on trumped-up charges.

When we arrived on Monday at noon, three days after the murder of Mabaso, the situation was still tense.

One woman, who asked not to be named for fear of reprisals, said they fear nightfall.

“I feel sorry for our children who, at the tender age, have witnessed the wanton killing of people they know and love. They are traumatised and this will lead them to grow up with anger and seeking revenge,” she said.

“Last night (Sunday, 8 May) there was someone who was firing ammunition wildly. The children scurried into the corner. You could see the fear in their eyes,” she added.

Her sentiments were echoed by many in the settlement.



Ekhenana resident Sabelo Simelane says they fear for their lives amid the murders. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

Two women were cleaning and rearranging the meagre furniture in the one-room shack where Mabaso lived. Both are on the executive committee of Abahlali's women's league local branch.

One of them, who is 27, said she had sent her own two-year-old daughter to live with her mother in another part of Mayville, because she feared she could be attacked.

"We just don't know who will be next," she said. "But we will not give up. If need be, we will go out here in a casket, just like it happened to Ayanda (Ngila) and just like it is happening to Nokuthula (Mabaso) and many other comrades."

Her fellow cleaner concurred: "We just don't have anywhere else to go. We will die here. They will just have to kill us all. We will not give up the struggle."

### **'Her life doesn't count'**

Abahlali BaseMjondolo said it doesn't expect the local police to arrest those who are responsible for Mabaso's killers.



Sindiswa Ngcobo at the spot where Nokuthula Mabaso was murdered near her shack in eKhenana outside Durban. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

“It has been days since her assassination. She is not a high-profile person and therefore there has been no undertaking from the police or the government to investigate her case with speed. She is a shack dweller who comes from a poor family. Her life does not count in the eyes of the state. This must change and it must change now.

“All progressive organisations and individuals need to work together to ensure that the assassination of activists stops. We cannot go on like this. It cannot be normal that if you are poor and black and you dare to stand up for your dignity, and the dignity of others, you can be assassinated with impunity. It has to stop,” said Abahlali spokesperson Thapelo Mohapi.



People gather for lunch daily in the Nokuthula Ndlovu community hall in eKhenana. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)



These women hid their faces while talking to Daily Maverick because they fear for their lives in the eKhenana informal settlement near Durban. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

Mary de Haas, a KwaZulu-Natal violence monitor, said the entire Mayville area is dangerous, with many illegal guns.

In October 2021, just days before the 1 November local government elections, the ANC's Ward 101 councillor candidate, Siyabonga Mkhize, and his bodyguard were shot and killed and two other men were wounded while campaigning door-to-door. He won the ward posthumously and a by-election was held early in 2022.

"The whole area of Mayville, Cato Crest and eKhenana is run by housing mafias, by people who are close to the local ANC councillors," De Haas said.



Women in eKhenana say they are living in fear as fellow residents continue to be killed. ‘We just don’t know who will be next,’ said one. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

“If they want your place they send people to threaten and tell you to move or else. Many people simply move away and allow the housing mafia to build a bigger structure so they can collect a rent. Those who refuse to move are killed. Abahlali BaseMjondolo have refused to bend to these housing mafia rules, so they are targeted. Their leading members are targeted and killed. The police are not helping out by arresting the suspects.

“Instead, they are quick to arrest members of Abahlali on trumped-up charges and these charges are thrown out in courts. By that time innocent people would have spent six months or more in prison, those who are working would have lost jobs and their images would be tarnished by being associated with murder,” she said.



A young woman collects water from a communal tap in the eKhenana informal settlement near Durban on 9 May 2022. (Photo: Phumlani Thabethe)

KwaZulu-Natal police spokesperson Constable Thenjiswa Ngcobo said there was no truth to the allegations that Cato Manor police station officers are protecting those attacking eKhenana residents. “There is no evidence to support that statement. Police are treating every case the same, giving these cases necessary attention. In the case of Ayanda Ngila, one suspect, Khaya Ngubane, has been arrested and has appeared in the Durban Magistrates’ Court and he is going through the court processes,” she said.

“The case of Nokuthula Mabaso is also handled by the same investigating team, but so far no one has been arrested. Police will make an arrest as soon as the suspects are identified.” **DM**

*This article was updated with a factual correction on the arrest of Ayanda Ngila’s murderers on Monday 16 May.*

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-05-13-we-will-die-here-ekhenana-residents-resolute-as-they-mourn-slain-activist/>