

## **Ethnic tension boils over**

*Source: Niren Tolsi, Mail and Guardian  
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On Monday at 5am Lindela Figlan, huddling with his wife and three-year-old daughter near a bus shelter in Sydenham, Durban, was too terrified to flag down the passing taxis.

During the previous two nights the Kennedy Road informal settlement had been racked by mob violence that resulted in two confirmed deaths and several shacks destroyed. More than 1000 people are estimated to have fled the settlement, fearing for their lives.

"I recognised some of the guys in the mob as taxi drivers, so I wasn't sure whether to take one in case they knew who I was," said Figlan. As chairperson of the Kennedy Road Development Committee (KRDC) and vice-president of the Abahlali baseMjondolo (ABM) shackdweller movement, he had initially sought refuge in an apartment block near Kennedy Road.

When he received word that the vigilantes knew of his whereabouts, he ventured out into the rainy early morning with his family, flailing around for an escape route to safety.

According to eyewitnesses, at around 11.30pm on Saturday September 26, the mob had surrounded the community hall at Kennedy Road where the ABM's youth league was holding an all-night political camp. The 30-strong mob, armed with bush knives, sticks, sjamboks and guns, had demanded to see Figlan and ABM president Sbu Zikode.

"They told us that they wanted Sbu because they wanted to know why he was selling Kennedy Road to the amaPondo," said Zodwa Nsibande, ABM youth league general secretary. "They kept saying Kennedy Road is for the amaZulu, not for the amaPondo," she added.

Nsibande said the nearby Sydenham police did not respond to calls for help: "They told us there were no vans available; there was just one crime intelligence officer who was also trying to call the police."

Police deny this.

"We finally managed to escape through the windows of the hall and [20 youth leaders] got into [ABM member] MaKhumalo's kombi and left for the various settlements at about 2.30am," said Nsibande.

The mob is alleged to have rampaged through the settlement, with the weekend's violence claiming the lives of Mthokozisi Ndlovu and Ndumiso Mnguni. There are unconfirmed reports of more deaths and missing people.

Eight people, alleged to be part of a safety and security forum affiliated to the KRDC,

were arrested and charged with murder and attempted murder. The case was remanded until October 8.

Figlan remembers being warned on Saturday evening that his life was in danger if he slept in Kennedy Road. Padlocking his shack from the outside to give the impression he was elsewhere, he'd then clambered in to sleep with his family.

"I couldn't really sleep and at one point I heard people banging on my door, saying, 'Where is the imfengu; we want to kill him. We want to kill the bloody Pondo ... I had to put my hand over my baby's mouth to stop her crying out and letting them know we were inside,' he said.

Zikode's shack was one of several looted and destroyed, with people taking bush knives to appliances, walls and the roof.

Residents of Kennedy Road say ethnic tension in the settlement has been simmering for a while and had heightened ahead of April's general election.

There is also a growing perception of a Cope-ANC split along ethnic lines in the settlement, with the amaXhosa and amaPondo seen as supporting Cope and the amaZulu considered ANC supporters.

Zama Ntuli (not her real name), an unemployed 21-year-old single mother who cares for her two younger sisters (aged seven and 14), her deceased sister's two sons (aged 16 and 11) and her own five-year-old daughter, said they, as Zulus, were traumatised: "On Sunday morning, we saw the dead body of our neighbour, and people were telling us that the amaPondo were coming for us. So we ran away and slept in the bush."

The provincial government denies that there is an ethnic element to the tension and killings. KwaZulu-Natal safety and security MEC Willies Mchunu said that he believed the "underlying cause for the violence was criminal, but if people feel there is an element of [ethnic conflict] we will take this very seriously and try to deal with it".

Zikode maintains that the ANC is capitalising on the tension in Kennedy Road to disembowel the ABM -- one of the largest social movements in the country with more than 20 000 members.

The ANC is also smarting, said Zikode, because the "poor shackdwellers had dared to take government to the Constitutional Court over the KZN Slums Act".

"In our fights against evictions and for housing in the city, we have been exposing government corruption in areas like Siyanda; we have been doing the job of an opposition party -- even though we are not -- and the ANC does not like this," said Zikode.

Two weeks earlier, eThekweni regional chairperson John Mchunu, addressing the ANC's regional general council, had specifically condemned the ABM for trying to divide the tripartite alliance: "The element of these NGO [sic] who are funded by the West to destabilise us; these elements use all forms of media and poor people.

"We know them very well; we have seen them using their power at Abahlali baseMjondolo."

An ANC source confirmed there "was a battle for the hearts and minds of the people

of Kennedy Road ... There is a political twist to this thing."

When told of Mchunu's utterances, Zikode cited a recent memorandum of understanding signed between the ABM and the eThekweni municipality to look into in situ upgrades of 14 informal settlements in which the ABM was active -- including Kennedy Road -- as evidence that the movement was willing to work with government.

"The ANC at this local level is worried because we don't tolerate corruption and want to be involved in the development of our communities so that things like shoddy workmanship, fraudulent housing allocations, corrupt tender procedures and the stealing of cement does not happen.

"This goes against how the ANC appears to do business when it comes to low-cost housing developments," he said.