

STATEMENT BY MASS DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT ON WINNIE MANDELA

16.02.89 12h30

Today's press conference is called after the culminating of community meetings in Soweto and throughout the country. The present controversy surrounding Mrs Mandela's "Football Club" has been the subject of intense discussion within the ranks of the Mass Democratic Movement. Numerous attempts have been made to resolve this matter but without much success.

We have now reached the state where we have no option but to speak publicly on what is a very sensitive and painful matter.

The Mandela family has always occupied a very special position in the hearts of our people. Mrs Mandela has been painfully separated from her husband for most of her married life - first, while Nelson Mandela worked in the underground of the ANC and thereafter, his imprisonment following the Rivonia Trial.

During this period, she has had to rear her children single-handedly in the face of lengthy house arrests, detentions and her cruel banishment to Brandfort. We pay tribute to her contribution.

In recent years, Mrs Mandela's actions have increasingly led her into conflict with various sections of the oppressed people and with the Mass Democratic Movement as a whole. The recent conflict in the community has centred largely around the conduct of her so-called Football Club which has been widely condemned by the community. In particular, we are outraged by the reign of terror that the team has been associated with. Not only is Mrs Mandela associated with the team, in fact, the team is her own creation.

We are of the view that Mrs Mandela has abused the trust and confidence which she has enjoyed over the years. She has not been a member of any of the democratic structures of the UDF and COSATU, and she has often acted without consulting the democratic movement. Often, her practices have violated the spirit and ethos of the democratic movement.

Numerous efforts have been made to reconcile the conflict between Mrs Mandela and the community. The last of these efforts was the formation of a crisis committee comprising of some of our most able and respected members. On every occasion Mrs Mandela has refused to co-operate and has chosen to disregard the sentiments of the community

The Democratic Movement has uncompromisingly fought against violations of human rights from whatever quarters. We are not prepared to remain silent where those who are violating human rights claim to be doing so in the name of the struggle against apartheid.

We are outraged at Mrs Mandela's complicity in the recent abductions and assault of Stompie. Had Stompie and his three colleagues not been abducted by Mrs Mandela's "Football Team", he would have been alive today.

The Mass Democratic Movement hereby distances itself from Mrs Mandela and her actions.

We call on our people, in particular, the Soweto community, to exercise this distancing in a dignified manner.

We take the opportunity to reaffirm our unqualified support for our leader, Nelson Mandela and call for his immediate release.

The actions associated with this football team, and even with members of his family should never be used to undermine the esteem in which we still hold comrade Nelson.