

Biography: Alfred Makaleng

Birth: c. 1961

Death: 1988

In Summary: Alfred Makaleng was an organizer with the United Democratic Front detained in 1986 under State of Emergency Regulations. He fell ill in prison; prison warders ignored his requests for medical assistance. Neglect contributed to Makaleng's death in detention.

Alfred Makaleng held leadership roles in multiple anti-apartheid coalitions yet there is little information regarding his life. Makaleng's death record indicates that he died in 1988 at the age of twenty seven, therefore, he was born around 1961. Makaleng was born and raised in the apartheid-era Transvaal Province. Growing up in this region, apartheid laws ensured that Makaleng could only further pursue his education at the University of the North at Turfloop. This university was created by the apartheid government under a policy that pushed for separate ethnically based institutions of higher learning. Under apartheid, the government regarded the University of the North as a model university that could portray the viability of this agenda. This resulted in the university receiving heavy government subsidies that posed an unfortunate predicament due to the fact that the students that the university was intended to serve were so under-resourced in their standard education that the quality of instruction was placed under incredible demands.

Turfloop was notorious for being a centre of resistance to apartheid in the late 1970s and early 80s when Makaleng was a student. Increasingly displeased black students combined with a rapidly growing [Black Consciousness Movement](#) influenced the university to conceive the [South African Students Organization](#) (SASO) whose inaugural head was none other than the anti-apartheid martyr Steve Biko. By enrolling as a student at the University of the

North at Turfloop during this time, Makaleng inadvertently placed himself at one of the nuclei of the anti-apartheid revolution.

After completing his education and introduction to activism, Alfred Makaleng decided to pursue involvement in the resistance. He worked his way to hold leadership roles in the [Congress of South African Trade Unions](#) (COSATU), the Construction and Allied Workers Union (CAWU) and the [United Democratic Front](#) (UDF). The Congress of South African Trade Unions was created in December of 1985 with a mission to create a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. The Construction and Allied Workers Union was established to create and give power to a community of likeminded labourers that could stand up to those in power. The United Democratic Front was the primary anti-apartheid coalition in the 1980s. The United Democratic Front's goal was to establish a non-racial, united South Africa in which segregation is abolished and in which society is freed from institutional and systematic racism. Its slogan was "UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides." Makaleng's role in the UDF was "Organiser"; his job was to create and design protests, rallies or any other resistance based events that could help promote the UDF's cause. Makaleng was involved in the UDF during one of the most intense time periods of the revolution:

"The 1984-1986 episode was a phase of resistance against the apartheid state of unparalleled scale and intensity: more massive, sustained, violent and more nationwide than previous uprisings. The UDF experienced a massive growth. The question arises whether organisational structures, strategy and tactics were adequate for such a massive challenge. In a critical examination of its own operations the National Executive of the UDF concluded in 1985 that its organisational structures were not able to keep up with spontaneous popular resistance, resulting in a lack of discipline

in mass actions. As stated by UDF spokesman Terror Lekota, echoing some criticisms of high profile leadership: "The struggle must be placed in the hands of the people. We are not here to struggle on behalf of the people, but with them." But of course state intervention also severely debilitated the UDF leadership: two years after the launch of the UDF three quarters of the membership of regional and national executives was eliminated by death or detention".¹

The United Democratic Front was so successful in its organising and protests that the government issued a State of Emergency in the summer of 1986 to detain UDF organisers and officials. The purpose *"of detention was the obvious gathering of intelligence and occasional recruitment of informers; the destruction of anti-apartheid organisations by separating them from leaders and activists; and a general intimidation, disruption and deterrence which forced*

thousands underground".² It was Makaleng's involvement in this organisation that eventually got him arrested as the apartheid government considered UDF leaders enemies of the state during the state of emergency actions in 1986. On 12 June, 1986, Alfred Makaleng and other United Democratic Front organisers were detained in the town of Nylstroom in the Transvaal Province under the state of emergency. Along with dozens of others, Makaleng was detained with Mr. Frans Mufapa Mohlala who worked with Makaleng as a fellow UDF organiser.³ Mohlala explained that the state of emergency "was an imposition by the government then, which gave them powers to detain anybody they thought is involved in anti-apartheid struggle, that is why there were more than thirty people who were detained country-wide under the state

¹ Merrett, Christopher. "Detention without Trial in South Africa: The Abuse of Human Rights as State Strategy in the Late 1980S." *Africa Today* 37, no. 2 (1990). doi:10.1163/2210-7975_hrd-1247-0042.

² Levin, Lydia. "Human Rights Index." *South African Journal on Human Rights* 7, no. 1 (February 2, 2017). doi:10.1163/ej.9789004160224.i-138.15.

³ In one TRC document, his name is spelled as Mufapa and in another Mofapa.

of emergency there, so anybody who was an activist, was regarded by the government then as opposed to the government, could be detained under the state of emergency.”⁴ This prison in the town of Nylstroom was the location of Makaleng’s last breaths.

The state kept Makaleng in detention for two years. He contracted an unidentifiable medical condition in his brain. I use the term unidentifiable because he had been neglected by authorities and was never given proper treatment. In a court hearing, Mohlala told this story to the TRC:

“He had been asking to be taken to hospital to specialists for almost two weeks before that incident happened and on that particular evening from around 9 o'clock, up until 7 o'clock in the morning the following morning, we couldn't sleep, he was screaming and in the morning he couldn't even scream any longer, he was like opening his mouth and no voice could come out and then they only took him after 7 o'clock the following morning out of the cell and took him to their reception where they put him there until 2 o'clock in the afternoon, when he was already brain dead, then they flew him to Pretoria with a helicopter. Our lawyer came to inform us that Alf had passed away and we already had heard that information from one of the prison warders, I've forgotten his name. He told us that by the time Alf was removed from the reception, he was already brain dead. So they put him there the whole day and then took him only when he was brain dead. So Sergeant Botha is the one who brought, he was one of the first

prison officials to come into the section at that time when emotions were still high and he was bringing food to us and the food that he brought was one of the food on the menu that we never liked in prison, so it also added to the emotions and that is — what

⁴ Frans Mufapa Mohlala, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, May 22, 2000. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans%5C2000/200522jh.htm>.

happened is I took the soup that he had brought which was hot and poured it over his head with a bowl and also assaulted him with the bowl."⁵

Prison officials neglected Makaleng and left him to die with little regard for the value of his life.

Sources:

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⁵ Frans Mufapa Mohlala, Truth and Reconciliation Commisison, May 22, 2000. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans%5C2000/200522jh.htm>.