

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

SPECIAL HEARINGS - PRISONS

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DATE: 21st JULY 1997

NAME: MR MURTHI NAIDOO/MR INDRES NAIDOO

MR PREMA NAIDOO/ MISS RAMNIE NAIDOO

MISS SHANTHIE NAIDOO

HELD AT: THE FORT - JOHNNESBURG

CASE: JB04506

DAY 1

DR BORAINÉ: As I indicated at the very beginning this morning, we have tried to have a window on a number of different areas affecting prison, prison life and prison abuse, the next group and it is a group, is one family and I'm going to read out their names, I hope there are enough chairs. There are five members of one family who have an enormous record not something one would want, an enormous record of suffering and deprivation and as I call their names I would be glad if they would come forward please. Murthie Naidoo, Indres Naidoo, Prema Naidoo, Ramnie Naidoo and Shanthie Naidoo, thank you very much.

Whilst they are coming up and I only mention this because I just got the note, it's got nothing to do with the fact that the Naidoo family are coming up but I understand his Excellency, The High Commissioner of India is amongst us, someone whom I know and I would like to welcome him very especially.

I know that earlier there were representatives from the Swiss Embassy and if there are any other Embassies represented I'd be very glad to know that so we can recognise them, not because they are kind of important but because it's very important for us that they take the time and the trouble to be here today, we are very glad to welcome His Excellency.

I would like to say a very warm word of welcome to all of you. I think to help me at least you should tell me who you are so I know exactly who we're talking to. Perhaps ... (tape blank) is to stand to take the oath. I assume that you will want to affirm the oath and we can do it together if you wouldn't mind standing please. Switch the red button please.

NAIDOO FAMILY: (sworn states)

DR BORAINÉ: Thank you very much, please be seated and I'll hand over to my colleague Hugh Lewin.

MR LEWIN: Well Indres is closest but I understand that Indres you will be leading the evidence, is that right and that you know the form that these hearings take.

We're very pleased that you have come forward as a family. I also know one of the first things you will tell us about is that it's just not you the siblings that we're actually talking about but your father who's involvement in the struggle goes way back and your mother as well. I think that for us as a Commission to hear a submission from a group like yourselves, is actually very important because it takes all sorts of points at the same time. I'd like to thank you for that and really hand over to you to dramatize this as you like and then possibly give us some time afterwards to ask some questions, thank very much.

MR I NAIDOO: I'll take the opportunity of starting. You see five of us here and as Hugh Lewin said it's not only the five of us but in fact our parents and our grandparents, our whole family has actually been involved in the struggle for well over a century.

My grandfather already at the latter part of the last century was involved in the struggle. He was the founding member of the Transvaal Union Congress in fact, the first President of the Transvaal Union Congress.

He was a very close colleague and collaborator with Mahatma Ghandi and the two of them organised a number of campaigns in the latter part of last century and the early part of this century. My grandfather has got a proud record of going to prison fourteen times. In fact on the fourteenth time they threatened to expel him, kick him out of South Africa but in spite of that he went back to prison. My grandmother who has also been to prison on a number of occasions, gave birth while in prison to her last child.

My father, at a very young age went over to Mahatma Ghandi to India and studied under Mahatma Ghandi and - After fourteen years, fifteen years in fact, he returned to South Africa to continue the struggle in South Africa.

My father has been to prison in 1936 during the historical defiance passive resistance. He went to jail again in 1946 during the passive resistance and he went to jail again in 1952 during the defiance campaign. During the defiance campaign he was chief volunteer officer for the defiance campaign whilst Nelson Mandela was commander of the defiance campaign.

My father passed away in 1952 but he also won Posthumous World Peace Award which was given to him by the World Peace Council.

My mum on the other hand has been a stalwart all her life, she has been to prison in '46, she has been to prison again in 1952 and right up to her death in 1993, she was an active member of the movement. One of her hopes was to see a free South Africa but unfortunately she died just six months before the democratic election.

Our home in Doornfontein was quite a central part of our struggle, it was raided constantly by the security branch from the time of the passive resistance right down to the defiance campaign, right down to MPA activities, our home was raided constantly by the security branch. Valuable documents, photographs, letters were confiscated from the house. The police used to come to our home at all hours of the morning, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock virtually breaking our doors down to search our house and this is how some of our family members had gone through the struggle.

I must point out to you very clearly that my family had always believed in a peaceful resolution to our struggle in this country and as I said to you, my grandfather won a peace award but you'd find that in 1961 I and my brothers and sisters all decided to take up arms against the regime. We joined MK and as a result took up arms. I believed at that time and I still do believe that it was necessary for us to take up arms against the regime, it was our form of struggle to bring about peace in this country, it was our peaceful contribution to the country.

I'd like to point out to you that one of the first instructions that were given by MK commanders was that we must avoid taking lives at all costs. Ours were acts of sabotage and that we must avoid at all costs to take lives. In fact one of the first lives to be taken was an MK member who died putting a bomb just outside, somewhere in Soweto by the name of Molefe.

I was arrested in 1963, on the morning of the 17th of April 1963. Myself and my comrades Reggie Vandia and Sherish Nanabai were arrested red-handed by the that time, Lieutenant Swanepoel and twenty to thirty heavily armed security warders. Swanepoel shouted immediately that we should stop and put up our hands which we all three did but Swanepoel shot, he shot me on my left shoulder and the bullet came out between my spine. The first remark Swanepoel made was, the Coollie is very

lucky, I aimed for his heart, and immediately thereafter all the policemen that were there got stuck into me with the butts of the rifles and they started hitting me.

Reggie Vandia who was my commander protested against me being beaten and they said oh Coollie you are a ... and that was the end of him. They brought him down and they beat him on the spot.

We were then taken to Pretoria police station where I was rushed to Coronation Hospital, I was thrown into the back of the van, literally thrown in like a bag of potatoes. When we got to Coronation Hospital the doctor examined me and he saw the bullet was sticking out between my spine, all he did was to take a tweezer and pull it out. He then said he'd like to detain me in hospital for the next two or three days for observation but the police refused and I was brought back.

Subsequently two of my other comrades were also arrested Abdullay Jassat and Lalu Chiba. They were picked up in their homes and we were taken to the Johannesburg Park station, police headquarters. The first person to be taken in for interrogation was Abdullay Jassat also known as Charlie Jassat. I could just hear him screaming please leave me, please leave me, I've had enough, I've got nothing to say. I don't know for how long but thereafter Abdullay Jassat appeared and when he appeared I didn't know whether I should laugh or whether I should cry, he walked in like a zombie, his face was swollen, he could hardly move and there he walked in.

After him Lalu Chiba was taken and I was the fourth person to be taken in. There must have been about fifteen or so heavily armed policemen and among them was Swanepoel and van der Berg. The first thing they did to me was they played rugby with me, they kicked me, punched me and dived at me from one policeman to another. How long this went on for I didn't know.

What they wanted to know from me was who was giving us instructions and where the headquarters of MK were. Thereafter I was thrown onto the chair and the policemen put electric wires on my fingers and on my toes and they attached it to a dry cell battery. The shock went through me, I didn't know how long it lasted because to you at that moment it seems endless. They did this to me two and three times.

Thereafter I went back to my other comrades and I assumed that I walked back in the same way as the others walked before me. Nevertheless we were then sentenced to ten years the three of us. Reggie Vandia, Sherish Nanabai and I were sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

One of the first most awful things I remember about prison and this happened at Leeuwkop Prison, it was a very cold day in May and it was raining, we were stripped

stark naked and we were made to put our hands against the wall and as I tried to turn around to see what was happening to me, a warder would hit me with a baton and said, Coollie look in front of you it's dark behind you ... going on. Then I heard other prisoners screaming and shouting and I heard the warder shouting, shit him out, shit him out ... what he was talking about. All of a sudden I found someone pushing their finger right up my rectum. This was one of the most humiliating things that ever happened to me and I heard the warder saying, oh he's still a virgin and then I realised what they were doing.

They then locked all three of us up in separate cells in the isolated section of Leeuwkop Prison and they gave us exercises twice a day for half an hour. They gave you exercises in such a fashion that you hated exercises. They made you run at full strength, full speed, barefoot, short pants, short sleeved shirt, they made you run along a corridor with a concrete floor and you ran from one end to the other. On the one end was a warder by the name of Magalies whose real name is Liebenberg, another warder by the name of Kumalo would stand on the other side and as we run past them they would hit us on the knees and our ankles. Each time we ran past them they would say faster, faster. As a result we dreaded this form of exercise.

We were kept there for a couple of months and this continued. Subsequently we were moved to Robben Island. It was the most awful journey I've had in my life, it was a journey that took two whole days. We stopped for a short while at Bloemfontein prison, we were all handcuffed and chained on our feet. At Bloemfontein we stopped to have lunch but from there we went right through without stopping until De Doorns. I was handcuffed to my comrade Henry Maghothi and you could hardly move in the van. We appealed to the warders to stop so that we could relieve ourselves, they would not listen to us. We became absolutely desperate, some of us would then move to the back, over bodies and try to get to the back of the van. When it was going uphill we tried to use a hole between the doors to urinate but unfortunately all of a sudden the van would go downhill which would mean the urine would shoot back into our van. This was our journey.

I must tell you that when we at De Doorns for the first time I saw a warder who was human, he actually asked us chaps would you like some tea? We thought he was playing the fool with us as up to this time no warder called us chaps, we were Coollies, we were Kaffirs, we were Boesman, we were terrorists to mention a few. Here a commanding officer called us chaps and offered us tea and he did give us hot tea and hot bread to eat.

We were then transferred to Robben Island. My story is a very, very long one, I'll have to cut down a lot on my story so I will just illustrate some of the atrocities that took place on Robben Island. I was amongst very few prisoners who were given

lashes on Robben Island. The warders came up to me, a Kleynhans brother, one of the Kleynhans brothers as there were four of them altogether who were sadists, absolute sadists, the eldest one came up to me and said I must go to the pool of dirty, stinking, stagnant water and drain the water in the quarry. I went there and I started draining the water when he said, no, no, no, take off your shoes and get into the water. I said no, there's no way I'm going to get into the dirty stagnant water as there was fine gravel stone there, you could get cut and it wasn't safe so I refused.

On returning to the prison that evening, he reported me to Lieutenant Naude saying that I refused to work and I disobeyed a lawful command. I was then charged for disobeying a lawful command and the final result was I was sentenced to four strokes. They tie you onto a ... your hands on both sides and your feet down there, you are stark naked, they put a padding on your back and a padding on your thigh exposing your buttock only.

The warder who did the caning could easily have weighed a hundred kilograms or more and he was a person of two metres tall. He chose of one of six or seven canes that were lying there. He tested them all, he tested the first, he tested the second and when he tested the one that gave him the right sound he said, this is it, this is it, I'm going to make the Coollie cry today. ... I'm not too sure of the name, I think it was Doctor van der Bergen examined me and he said oh this Coollie is all right. ...

The first shot that landed, landed right in the middle of my buttock, it cut my buttock down the middle, I felt the pain but I kept my mouth shut and held on. The warder then applied iodine which was even worse because the iodine burnt you.

The second shot fortunately for me the cane landed on my buttock, the other half landed on the canvass which took quite a bit of the sting away. The third one fortunately again landed entirely on the cushion but the fourth one, by this time the warder was very furious with himself, he said this has never happened to him before. The fifth one landed right on the first cut, cutting me even deeper and they again applied iodine. I see my brother is showing me the watch.

They loosened me and I felt that if I put my clothing on there I would faint immediately so I just grabbed my clothing and walked to my cell with my clothing. It was only when I got to my cell that I fainted.

With the atrocities, it was a daily occurrence on the Island, we were beaten with rubber hoses, we were beaten with batons, we were beaten with anything that they had with them. Their attitude was that this is Robben Island and no prisoners leave Robben Island alive and that was very, very clear to us.

Unfortunately, we were the first three Coolies to be on the Island and the warders would say where are the Coolies. It was a bad time. Unfortunately when more Coolies joined us once again they said where are those Coolies ... and this went on continuously. Nevertheless we never took all this torture, all this harassment without a fight.

We went on hunger strikes. I remember the first time we had a strike we went on hunger strike for five days. We were separated from Nelson Mandela and others, they were in isolation cells and we were in the communal cells. We started the hunger strike in the communal cell and Mandela and others only heard the next day that we were on hunger strike and they joined us the following day and when they asked comrade Mandela, why are you on strike he said, I don't know I ask my comrades on the other side.

We went on hunger strike, we went on boycotts. Every time a visitor whether he was a Fascist, whether he was a journalist, whoever it was we raised our complaints and in this way we hoped that our conditions on Robben Island would be exposed to the world.

I was beaten so badly on the Island that today I am totally deaf in my left ear and when I went to the doctor for treatment, the doctor just gave me some drops and that's it. When I came out of prison years later I was told by specialists that if they attended to it then there would be a chance of me saving my hearing.

I was released in 1973 with my two other comrades and all of us were put under house arrest. Being under house arrest meant that I could no longer speak to Shanthie, I could not long speak to Murthie and I could no longer speak to Sherish and Reggie my comrades that were with me in jail.

In 1976 the Soweto uprising took place and the ANC pulled me out of the country in 1977. I spent the next fifteen years in exile in Mozambique. I was there when in 1980 the SADF killed thirteen of our comrades in Matola. I was there when the South African Air Force bombed Maputo and killed one ANC person and four Mozambican civilians. I was there when Ruth Furst was blown up in 1982.

In 1986 we were asked to leave Mozambique for our own safety. The President of Mozambique, Comrade Chisano said we are not kicking you out of Mozambique but for our sakes he would like us to leave Mozambique and we left.

I returned to Mozambique on my way to Berlin. Albie Sacks picked me up at the airport, this was in 1988 and was going to take me back to the airport for my departure to Berlin but the day before my departure to Berlin, Albie Sacks was blown up in a car

bomb that blew his hands off and extensively damaged him. I saw him on that day and I saw him the day I was leaving for Berlin and Albie said to me, Indres I'm sorry I cannot take you to the airport.

Months and months later I got word from South Africa or in fact from the Weekly Mail that a certain warder or a certain prisoner, a certain policeman has confessed that he placed the bomb that injured Albie Sacks. He said that bomb was not meant for Albie, that bomb was actually meant for Indres as he knew Indres was in Maputo for one week and on his way to Berlin, it was meant for him but unfortunately Albie got injured. They had some other method for Albie.

While in exile we lived in constant fear of attacks in Maputo, even in East Berlin where we were quite secure, there were a number of threats on our lives. I think I have said enough, I would like my brothers and sisters to make their contribution.

DR BORAINÉ: Thanks very much, who's next Prema? Shanthie?

MR P NAIDOO: ... (not audible)

DR BORAINÉ: Okay, thank you.

MISS S NAIDOO: I was banned for five years in the same year Indres was arrested. I was then the breadwinner as well and I couldn't work as I got sacked where I was working. Fortunately I've managed to find a job. I was banned again in '68. I was then detained in 1969 under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act and I was held for two weeks here at The Fort in the women's section of the prison. I was in solitary throughout, I wasn't even allowed out for a shower or a bath, water was brought to me and I wasn't even allowed to empty my own bucket.

Two weeks later I was taken to a building where I was interrogated for six days. The person in charge of interrogation was the famous Swanepoel who shot my brother. I was made to stand and I don't know for how long and towards the end I lost consciousness with reality and I was sort of hallucinating, I was dreaming of going in a plane, it had something to do with bringing money into the country and so on.

On the fifth day I was allowed to sleep for a few hours and when I got up I felt like there was no floor anymore, it was the most horrible feeling. I was interrogated on this dream. They then took me to Pretoria Central and left me there in solitary and I was held in similar conditions as I was in The Fort.

Six months later they took me to give evidence in the trial twenty two, Joyce Sekukane and Winnie Mandela where I refused to give evidence. I was then sentenced to two months imprisonment.

Although I was now a prisoner my detention did not end, they continued to hold me in the same cell, the only difference was that the regular Magistrate visit didn't exist for the two months and I had prison clothes but I had no letters, no contact with my family. I have no idea where I was held.

MR LEWIN: This was at the women's section at Central.

MISS S NAIDOO: In Pretoria Central Prison. I was released a year and a week after I was actually originally detained. They just continued with my banning orders and I then had a struggle leaving the country. They gave me an exit permit but they wouldn't release me from my banning order to go to a port of departure. ... Robert Sobukwe and myself and we lost this at the highest court and eventually after a lot of campaigning my people, my anti-apartheid organisations and the people in ours I left the country in 1972 and returned in 1991.

MR LEWIN: Thanks very much. Murthie?

MR M NAIDOO: I was first detained in 1965 on my way to visit Indres on Robben Island. I was arrested at the airport in Cape Town and was held overnight in a dark filthy cell in Roeland Street Prison. The next day I was taken to Swartkop Aerodrome in Pretoria in a light military aircraft. It was a journey I will never forget to this day because I vomited from Cape Town to Pretoria, I was violently sick the entire flight from airsickness. I was driven to Pretoria Central Prison, I was stripped naked and searched and was given back my clothes except for my belt, shoelaces and watch. They said the belt would prevent me from committing suicide in prison but I had no intention of committing suicide.

I was held in solitary confinement for a fortnight in a small cell of about three metres by two metres. I slept on a grass mat with two blankets, it was bitterly cold. One small bucket in the corner was my bathroom, another bucket contained water. I was fed mielie rice and water only and I was usually allowed to exercise for half an hour a day.

After two weeks I was taken to ... buildings where I was interrogated, verbally abused and assaulted. One of my torturers was Roy... Swanepoel, that's the only policeman I remember who boasted to me that he had shot my brother. At one point I was kept awake for two days and one night. After making a statement I was taken back to my cell where I was kept in solitary for four months under the 180 day law.

I must confess that solitary confinement is the worst kind of torture that can be inflicted on any human being. No amount of physical torture can equal that of solitary confinement. I had absolutely no contact with any of the other prisoners who were almost entirely common-law prisoners but I could continually hear the beating and sjamboking of other prisoners.

At some time during my detention we used to get the Rand Daily Mail and I followed very closely the Harold Strachan Trial and exactly what he had said in his newspaper article, of the beating and sjamboking of prisoners is what I had heard continually every day. On my release I was listed as a communist.

My second spell of detention stretched from May 1980 to August 10th, 1980 under the General Law Amendment Act. I'd been involved with the Parents of Detainees Committee in ... during the student unrest. During this period I was again interrogated, assaulted and held in solitary confinement for two weeks. Sometime during this period I saw a headline in a newspaper in the prison office about the Sasolburg explosion. When a policeman saw me looking at this newspaper and reading it he became visibly very angry and beat me with his fists.

Subsequently we were taken to Modder Bee prison where I was held with other detainees from around the country in communal cells until the 10th of August when we were released.

MR LEWIN: Thanks very much Murthie. Prema? I think we might have to ask you to be slightly briefer than Indres because I know your story goes on a long time, thank you.

MR P NAIDOO: I was arrested for the first time in my house in Lenasia at 5a.m. on the 27th of November 1981. I was in perfect health physically and mentally. The security police did not tell me where they were taking me all they said was, pack your bag and I was taken to John Vorster Square for questioning.

I was in solitary for three months and during that period I was badly tortured and my health was severely damaged. I lost the hearing of my left ear, until today I still wear a hearing aid as I lost 75% of my hearing in my ear. When I was beaten on my right ear my ear rang, I've still got a buzzing sound in my ear since then. Within hours of my being detained a Major Abrie grabbed me and smacked me, he beat me up, banged my head on the desk and he said to me that I must give him the names of people who belonged to the Internal Reconstruction and Development Department of the ANC or I would die. I told him I had nothing to do with that department. He made me sit in the corner for a few hours and he then took me to the cell.

At the cell when I was taken to John Vorster Square I was made to face the wall and I saw another detainee coming up, I managed to peep and it was comrade Cedric Mason. I was put into the cell of comrade Cedric Mason but I don't know where Cedric Mason was taken to. That was on a Friday evening. I was left in my cell the Saturday and Sunday and on Monday morning my interrogation began. They handcuffed my wrist to my ankle and I was told to remain like that and I was asked questions such as, who were the other people who were members of IRDD. The person who handcuffed me, my wrist to my ankle was Warrant Officer Smith. He then placed a plastic bag and proceeded to question me and each time I gave the same answer he punched and kicked me.

At lunch time the bag and handcuffs were removed and I was given soup and bread. Immediately after lunch the handcuffs were put back onto my wrist and ankle and the questioning and punching started again. After about two hours the cuffs were removed and Warrant Officer Smith made me squat and do pushup exercises on the floor. This routine followed the next day.

That afternoon late a policeman by the name of Prins came into the room and without saying anything, my wrist was still handcuffed to my ankle, he pushed me down onto the floor and put his foot on the cuffs which dug into my ankle and with a little piece of stick which had a key on it, he beat me onto the soles of my feet. This continued for some time.

After that the cuffs were removed and I was asked to hold a chair above my head kneeling and the questioning continued. This kind of interrogation continued for the next two days at John Vorster Square. They kept telling me that if I do not talk, I was going to shit. They said to me, did I see the sign when I was brought to John Vorster Square and I said to them I didn't see any sign and they said there was a sign there that said, beware of flying Indians. At one point they threatened to take me to the Vaal Dam and drown me. This continued throughout the night.

The next morning I was taken to Vereeniging Police Station. At Vereeniging Police Station I was interrogated continually for six days and six nights in teams. The people who were involved in the interrogation was Warrant Officer Smith, Warrant Officer Booyens, Warrant Officer van der Merwe, Lieutenant Venter and somebody by the name of Schalkie who continued to interrogate me.

On the sixth day of my interrogation I began to fall asleep on my feet and I had a dream and I began to talk about my involvement in harbouring and assisting in the escape from the country of Steven Lee. I began to talk, I couldn't stop myself, it was something the police didn't know anything about but I realised at that point that I was doing something that I shouldn't be doing, I shouldn't be talking but I also could not

stop. I'd given them the whole story of how I'd assisted in harbouring and getting Steven Lee out of the country.

I was then taken back to my cell and I felt ashamed of myself that I began to tell the police something which I had no right to tell them. I implicated other comrades who took part in this escape. I contemplated suicide, not because I was hurt or anything but because I felt I had betrayed the cause, the cause which I believed in.

MR LEWIN: Take some water Prema.

MR P NAIDOO: It was probably the most worst period of my life because I had broken and I had given names, I really felt ashamed that I had done that. There were two electric wires that were sticking out of the ceiling and I was thinking how to get there because of what I'd thought I'd done, I'd given names of comrades who trusted and worked with me but those wires were too high. I was then left in the cell for a few days and one morning I was taken from my cell and I was chained, leg irons and handcuffed and taken to John Vorster Square. They didn't tell me where they were taking me and on the way I saw a placard that said, Detainee Found Hanged in Cell. I didn't know how to feel, I didn't know who this person was but when I saw this I felt close to the person who had died in the cell.

They took me to the tenth floor, they took me to a room and there must have been about ten security policemen in the room, I was still handcuffed and chained. They then brought my wife into the room, they were abusive to my wife and to me and they told my wife if she said anything other than personal matters, they would detain her and lock her up. That meeting lasted for about five minutes, it was the first time that I'd seen a family member.

They then took me back to Vereeniging Police Station and at Vereeniging Police Station I asked the warder who had died? The next morning, Saturday morning he brought me a Citizen and I saw it was comrade Neil Agget. I didn't know comrade Neil Agget at the time but reading the story of Neil Agget I was convinced in my mind that the same team that had interrogated me, had interrogated Neil Agget. I would like the Truth Commission to investigate that because during my interrogation they sometimes made mention of the fact of interrogating a White man in the room. After my detention when I put things together I was strongly of the view that it was possibly the same team, some of those names that I have mentioned.

I was sentenced to eighteen months for harbouring and assisting in the leaving of the country of Steven Lee. I didn't serve my sentence with political prisoners, I was brought here to the this very prison The Johannesburg Fort and I served my sentence with common-law prisoners.

The beatings that had taken place between common-law prisoners and common-law prisoners made me sick. I believe that they put myself and comrade Sherish amongst common-law prisoners because they felt that they would mess us up but fortunately the common-law prisoners respected us and they never touched us. The infighting amongst common-law prisoners and what warders were doing to prisoners was terrible.

On one occasion in this very prison, one prisoner had assaulted another prisoner and the authorities opened the door and let out all the prisoners but they took myself and Sherish and they put us into another cell. They stripped the common-law prisoners stark naked. There must have been about sixty of eighty of them and made them take out all their belongings in the cell so that the cell was empty and they then put about two or three millimetres of water in the cell. The warders, I don't know how many, maybe ten or twelve, then formed two lines and they asked the prisoners to run into the cell, they formed this line between the doors of the cell. They were all naked and they all had to run back into the cell and as they ran they used to hit them with a donkey piel. They didn't do this to myself and Sherish as we were taken out and put into another cell. When these common-law prisoners came back into the cell they couldn't sit because there was water in the cell, nothing else, and they would lock them up and leave them like that for the whole night. I served the last part of my sentence at the new Johannesburg Prison.

I think we as a family are not the only family who suffered this kind of abuse and indignation as there are many comrades who are here today with families and friends who walked with us side by side and they too had suffered similar. We would like the Truth Commission to investigate the human rights abuses against our family and other people who spent their lives in prison.

We would also like the Truth Commission to investigate as Indres pointed out, many of our documents and treasured possessions from our families has been taken over the years, some were telegrams of the death of my grandfather. These were very valuable to the family and to this date we don't know where these documents are and we have never ever seen them. I would like the Truth Commission to investigate that, thank you very much.

MR LEWIN: Thank you very much Prema. Ramnie you're not going to ... Mr Chairman I don't really have any questions because I mean we've had a litany of, I've just been making a note of the number of prisons and it's virtually a litany of the prisons in South Africa. We've heard of Barberton this morning but every other one from Robben Island to Leeuwkop to Pretoria Central, Pretoria Central Female's Jail, Roeland Street, Compal, The Greys, John Vorster Square, Modder Bee and then Sun City between you, you have populated them all.

I would just like to ask one question because it is very germane to what we're looking at today in terms of the prisons. Your joint experience has involved a great deal of mishandling in the hands of the security and you have also been in the hands of prison officials, what we now call correctional services. In your joint experience, do you think there was ever any difference between the way that you were treated for instance by security police and prison warders?

MR P NAIDOO: There was an obvious glaring similarity between the way the police treated us and the prison authorities as they treated us equally as badly.

MR LEWIN: So when you arrived at a prison as a detainee before you were sentenced, was the treatment the same, did you see a collusion between the police and prison ...? (tape blank)

MR I NAIDOO: In fact there was no difference whatsoever, you first landed up in the hands of the security police who did what they wanted to do. In our case we were detained at The Fort, fortunately for us while we were detained at The Fort we were under medical treatment. I had a bullet in my hand, I had a couple of ribs broken. Reggie Vandia had his right hand broken and a couple of ribs broken. Sherish Nanabai had lots of injuries and our lawyers insisted that we remain in hospital here at The Fort but conditions were the same.

Prema has highlighted the question of the common-law prisoners. On Robben Island we found a similar situation where the bulk of the political prisoners were mixed with common-law prisoners. These common-law prisoners were hardened common-law prisoners who were serving one life, two life, three life, four life sentences and their only ambition in life was to escape from the prison, knowing they would come back again. Their intention was to get us down to the same level as the common-law prisoners. As Prema says many of them were very sympathetic, some of them in fact joined the various movements and their whole tactic of trying to dehumanize us through the common-law prisoners completely backfired.

One other point I'd like to make, while we talked of our grandfathers, of our fathers and ourselves we all forgot to mention one generation that comes after us ... (interrupted)

MR LEWIN: Yes I see ...

MR I NAIDOO: Prema's eldest son who in fact is the fourth generation in the family was detained in 198...

MR LEWIN: '87 you say in your statement.

MR P NAIDOO: Even the fourth generation have been fully in the struggle and they're all active today with the ANC Youth League and the various youth movements.

MR LEWIN: Can I therefore try and take us forward without denigrating anything of the past. On the basis of your experience and your contact both with the police and/or the security police and the prisons officials, what sort of recommendations to you think we should make particularly about the regulation of prisons?

MR P NAIDOO: As I said I served my entire sentence with common-law prisoners and in my experience in prison at that time there is no such thing as rehabilitation. I think prisoners were abused from morning till night. People were swearing from morning till night and I believe that it should be built into our prison system about rehabilitation because I believe everybody has some kind of good in them and if people have committed a crime, a criminal offence they need to be rehabilitated. We need look at ways and means in which to make them better people when they come out of prison.

MR LEWIN: Thank you.

MR I NAIDOO: That's absolutely true in fact the entire prison system as it is or as it was I should say makes good people into criminals. A lot of the common-law prisoners that first come to prison, come for petty offences serving six months to a year and within a short space of time they get observed into the present condition and before you know what happens they are part and parcel of one gang or the other. Then of course they are involved in assaults, murder and so forth so the whole system has to be looked into and we have to find a more human system to imprison our people.

MR LEWIN: Could I ask, Prema you were the last person to be in prison at that stage in the late '80's, no it was '84 sorry so at that stage it was still very much segregated in racial terms?

MR P NAIDOO: Absolutely there was ... much segregation, there used to be ... happening in prison, for example the diet. They had a special diet for African people and a different diet for Indians. African prisoners used to get mielie rice and samp where Indian prisoners used to get bread and when you live in one cell whether you're a political prisoner or whether you're a common-law prisoner it's a problem because one part of the community gets a particular diet and the other part gets another diet. That was the diet and you had to take it or leave it. In prison, Indres didn't mention this, when Indres was arrested he was a vegetarian and the prison at the time didn't make allowances for vegetarians or people of different religious beliefs who eat certain things and who don't eat certain things, you had to eat the food or go without.

I remember on many occasions, we are not Muslims but Muslims would never eat pork and on many occasions when we were detained the only thing on the menu was pork. Not for religious reasons I just don't like pork and the warders used to jokingly say that this pork is koshered in a mocking way, mocking at people's religion and people's beliefs.

MR LEWIN: Thank you. Mr Chair if I could just ask one final question before passing back to you.

Prema in your statement talking about the detention at John Vorster Square when visited by your wife, this actually ties up with other cases that we've had, could I repeat it or could you repeat it? Do you remember the statement from Conrad or Cronwright I presume it is?

MR P NAIDOO: My wife is here and when I was detained my wife became a member of the Detainees Parents Support Committee and they used to have placard demonstrations outside John Vorster Square on many occasions. I was never allowed to go to the window to look out while they were interrogating me but I heard them talking while they were interrogating and Cronwright himself, although he never physically abused me, verbally abused me and my wife on many occasions. When my wife visited on the first occasion my wife telephonically made the arrangements that my wife, my sons and my mother will come for the visit but when they came to John Vorster Square they only allowed my wife to come. Cronwright was quite abusive. He said to my wife that because she demonstrated outside and because she went to the Rand Daily Mail, because the clothing that I sent back, when they interrogated me my lips started to bleed and there was some blood on my clothing and my wife didn't know where the blood had come from, she went to the Rand Daily Mail, or the Star or whatever, they actually said to her that because she had gone to the press, they were going to punish me further.

MR LEWIN: And the comment about the heights? ...(tape blank)

MR P NAIDOO: They said to my wife that they were going to rename John Vorster Square, they said they call it Tumour Heights but when they finished with me they will call it Prema Heights.

MR LEWIN: Thank you.

DR BORAINÉ: Mrs Seroke?

MRS SEROKE: I notice in your statement you say that the whole family was reunited after twenty eight years and then you say when Ama, your mum had her

second and fatal heart attack, was this so overwhelming for her, this reunion? Can you explain that for us because I find that very moving that a mother who has had her entire family separated from her should now die when they are together? ...

MR I NAIDOO: In fact from 1963 right up to 1990 we were never together. I was on Robben Island for ten years, Shanthie disappeared into prison for a number of years, Ramnie went into exile thereafter and Shanthie joined him in exile and when I came into prison, I went into exile. So in the twenty year period my mum never had her five children all together although she saw some of us. She came to London where she saw Ramnie and Shanthie and she also had the opportunity of coming to Maputo to see me while I was in Maputo. When Shanthie, myself and Ramnie returned to South Africa in 1991 she was very, very pleased by this, she felt that this was what she has fought for all her life and we are now in the verge of getting our freedom. As a result we got together and in '91 when she turned eighty four years old. We decided to give her a nice big birthday party where a number of our comrades were invited, people like comrade Walter Sisulu, comrade ... and a number of others came along and my mum felt that this was in fact what she really wanted. Her death in 1993, my mum was suffering from heart problems but this is as a result of the hardship under which she went all these years, going from one prison to another to visit her sons and daughters. Like Shanthie says she doesn't know if there is another mother who has seen the inside of more prisons that she has. She had seen practically all the prisons from here to Cape Town.

She'd also seen the police stations in the Gauteng area. I think this was the position with her and her death in 1993 is because of the hard life she led all these years.

DR BORAINÉ: I would like to, on behalf of the Commission thank you very much indeed. It's a very unusual experience for the Commission to have five members of one family and as you say there are others who are following in your footsteps. Over a century of struggle and commitment and we just want to thank you most warmly for sharing with us your own, very often bitter and difficult circumstances and to know that you are alive and able to continue to build where so much was destroyed, thank you very much indeed.

Ladies and gentlemen can I ask you to spend just a moment please. We had hoped to conclude with a submission from Correctional Services but they have informed us that they will not be doing so and we very much regret this as we don't quite know why but this brings us to the end of our first day. May I remind you that we meet again tomorrow.

Can I say a word of thanks to all those who made this hearing possible. Thank you to you for coming along, I'm very grateful to you that you've taken this trouble. I'd like

to thank the media for their assistance, a lot of this was broadcast live on radio and of course we have the television and many people who are from the print media.

I'd like to thank the Interpreters, I know that you haven't had a very hard job today but thank you very much indeed.

More especially to those who've actually come and given their witness today, I'd like to thank them very warmly.

We have experienced a total spectrum of South Africa united in suffering. We've been reminded of the awful, awful price that South Africa has had to pay for its democracy but we've also been reminded over and over again that although many have been united in suffering and hardship and pain and death, there's also united in victory and a commitment to healing and reconciliation. This I hope will be the message that goes from this hearing and this is what we will continue to work for and to build, a country which is of many colours, of both genders, of many races, of many sophistication's and many, many people all walking hopefully towards an even greater united and reconciled country.

Thank you to my panel and thank you to you all, good day.

HEARING ADJOURNS
