

56th detainee to die

SAMUEL TSHIKUDO

Preacher who died behind bars lived in the back of beyond

A small cluster of clay huts nestles on a lush mountainside 10km from the nearest tarred road, hidden by a thick cloud of mist and almost entirely cut off from "civilisation"...

That's where the Mail found the family of Samuel Tshikhudo, the Venda farmer and, according to his wife, lay preacher who became the second victim of the "homeland's" security laws when he died in detention two weeks ago.

Without the help of two eager guides, it would have been impossible to find the settlement.

The guides also acted as interpreters as Mr Tshikhudo's family speaks little English.

Through them, it was established that the dead man, aged 52, had three wives, one of whom — Sophia — deserted him a few years ago, and 11 children, seven with one wife and four with another.

He farmed vegetables for a living, earning about R200 a month, and was a preacher with the Zion Revelation Church of Southern Africa.

Mr Tshikhudo was a well-known and respected figure in the area. The locals came to him with all sorts of problems, often asking his assistance with farming and other matters.

The head of Venda's security branch, Brigadier N T Ramabulana, said Mr Tshikhudo had been arrested under the Terrorism Act. The brigadier would not say what crime he was suspected of, adding that this would be "decided by the court".

His first wife, Mrs Gladice Tshikhudo 44, wearing an old short-sleeved dress and a blanket wrapped around her waist, spoke of the day "they came to fetch my husband", and how she came to hear of the news of his death in a police cell two days later.

For Mrs Tshikhudo the news came as a terrible shock. She is a simple, rural woman who, until her husband's



Samuel Tshikhudo, family man

detention, had not even met a policeman. Not only has his death left her heartbroken — it has also left her confused.

She said six policemen came to her home to arrest Mr Tshikhudo. They returned the next day for her and his second wife, Gogogo, who lives about 12km away.

Mrs Tshikhudo said she was taken to the police station at Sibasa, where she was put in a cell and questioned about her husband.

She last saw him two weeks ago when the police brought him home to conduct a search. All Mr Tshikhudo said to his wife at their final meeting was to tell her how much money he owed at a store nearby.

A Captain Makwarela informed Mrs Tshikhudo of her husband's death. "He came here and wanted to know if I had any disease, like typhoid," Mrs Tshikhudo said.

The police did not tell her how her husband died, although they told the family's lawyers that the cause was typhoid and/or diabetes — a statement they later retracted.

The dead man had lived in Venda all his life.

He was very keen that all his children should receive a good education and went to great trouble to send them to schools in the area.

His name is known throughout the area where he lived. All the locals questioned said they knew him and were eager to show the way to his home, despite the terrible weather.

They spoke of him as a kind, simple man, devoted to his family.

He is buried in a cemetery in the Sibasa district — another victim of security legislation which affords no right of reply, and which dealt a simple family a tragic and confusing blow.

From an article in the Rand Daily Mail, printed with permission