

An interview used in "Attacking the Heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit" (Penguin, 2025), Yunus Carrim

MK Special Operations Unit

Interviews

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Johannesburg (by email)

Would you briefly give me an overview of your family background? To what extent did your family or your siblings influence you to become socially and politically aware?

My family was apolitical, though supportive of the liberation movements.

Did your siblings, neighbours, school friends, other friends, teachers or others influence you to become socially and politically aware?

The first influence was during the 1976 school resistance against the introduction of Afrikaans in all subjects. In our school, we started demonstrations two days after the other schools.

I also interacted with Sammy Sehole in 1981 when we planned to collect the Lokwalo Lwa Mosepele – the then prescribed ID's for Tswanas – with the intention to leave the country. Unfortunately, he left without contacting me again.

Then, in 1988, I was approached by a friend, teammate and colleague, a teacher, Mandlenkosi Vilakazi to join a Special Ops cell under the command of Valdez (Xolile Sam).

I did not leave the country to get any training in MK, but as a member of the Special Ops unit, I went to Botswana for operational purposes. I assisted with conveying messages to and from Botswana and bringing money to the unit. And I also assisted Valdez with a DLB (dead letter box) in which there was the materiel for the Witbank Security Police operation.

Do you know how the police got to know about your and Mandlenkosi's role in the Witbank operation?

From the information I got from Mkhululi (Makwale Nyalunga), they first made arrests at Witbank, seemingly a Friday before they came to us on Monday.

When did you get arrested?

14 November 1988, I think.

What date were you found guilty?

We were sentenced on the 27 July 1990

How long were you sentenced for?

18 years.

When were you released?

We were released on Friday, 5 July 1991 – during the first national ANC Conference after the unbanning. We were taken to Durban to be briefed by the ANC leadership, including OR (Tambo), Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and others. We were thanked for our commitment to the struggle and further informed that it is not yet over and we need to be vigilant. We were introduced by the newly elected President of the ANC, Mandela, to the masses which gathered at Kings Park Stadium on Sunday, 7 July 1991.

What role have you played in the country since your release?

As a member of the ANC and as an activist in the SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers' Union). I served in various roles in the union and was elected as its first Gauteng provincial secretary.

I worked as a teacher and became a principal of two secondary schools from 1998 to 2012 – Khanya-Lesedi in Ratanda and Masithwalisane Secondary School in Vosloorus

From May 2012 till now I serve as a district education official, as a Chief Education Specialist, which is the equivalent of Deputy Director.

How do you see the country at present?

We certainly have the potential to develop as long as we can solve internal organisational challenges, especially internal discipline – and we need to thereafter take the country beyond this stage.

We need the youth to be focused, hardworking, and join politics, not for personal gains, but for the development of the whole country. They need to be humble and of service to the nation, and not be arrogant like most of our current leaders, they need to show a high level of respect for all, as well as our properties.