

UDF anger at prison death

Dispatch Reporter

EAST LONDON — The Border branch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) has expressed "deep anger" at the death in prison of a Queenstown branch member of the Detainees Support Committee, Mr Mbuyiselo Songelwa, on October 5.

In a statement signed by the general secretary of the Border branch, the Reverend A. M. Stofile, the UDF said the South African Prisons Services had alleged that Mr Songelwa had died after an asthma attack, although the UDF had information from Mr Songelwa's cellmates that Mr Songelwa had died of a heart attack suffered on Friday, October 3.

Although numerous attempts by his cell mates to alert the authorities were made, he was only attended to on Saturday afternoon, when he was taken from his cell, the UDF said in its statement.

The liaison officer of the South African Prisons Services, Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. van Vuuren, has denied that no attention was given to Mr Songelwa, who reported a possible asthma attack only on Sunday, October 5.

Colonel Van Vuuren yesterday denied that Mr Songelwa, or any of his cell mates, had reported that Mr Songelwa suffered any ailment on Friday, October 3.

He said Mr Songelwa had received regular medical attention for his ailment. He had also been admitted to

Frere Hospital for treatment after an asthma attack.

He said Mr Songelwa died on Sunday morning, October 5, on the way to hospital, after he had reported the suspected asthma attack.

Colonel Van Vuuren said it was customary with all cases of deaths in prison that a departmental inquiry was conducted. The department was prepared to co-operate to the full if an inquest was held, he added.

A lawyer representing the family said the findings of a family-appointed pathologist, Dr Leonard Anstey of Cape Town, were that Mr Songelwa died of a compound effect of four old lung diseases.

The UDF said Mr Songelwa was not the first to have died.

The statement said the government had forfeited its right to exist.

The UDF called for an end to the state of emergency — and the release of the nine other people from Queenstown — who had been held with Mr Songelwa while awaiting trial.

"To the authorities we want to say: The struggle will continue. With time, the people and commitment on our side, we cannot but be victorious," the UDF said.

Mr Songelwa was arrested in December last year with nine other Queenstown people. No charges had been laid against them and bail had been refused for the group.

Mr Songelwa will be buried tomorrow in Queenstown.