

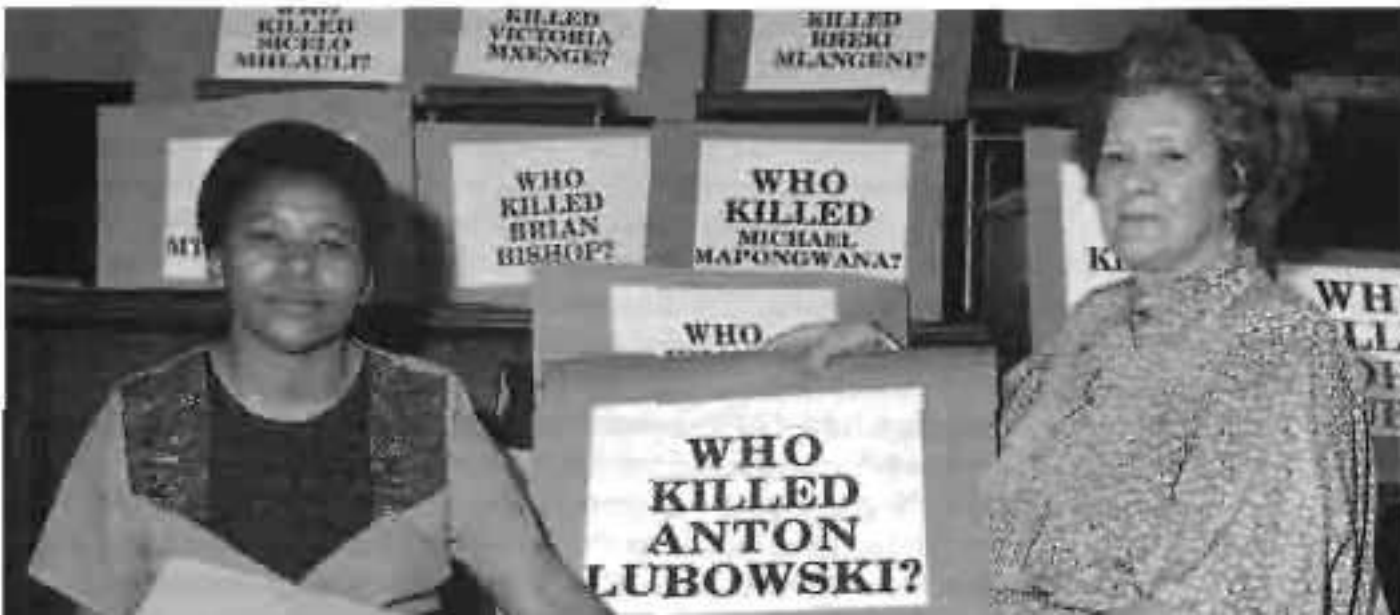
# Safe space for truth



Sheena Duncan



Livingstone Mxenge



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## ALICE COETZEE reports on provisions for dealing with the pain.

translation. People will also be available to reassure victims before they testify.

A warning note, however, was sounded by Abrahams, who said victims needed to be aware of the commission's limitations. Expectations of substantial material compensation or the redressing of wrongs might not necessarily be met.

She said that within the context of the Trauma Centre, for example, it was important for clients' expectations to be addressed so that they did not have an unrealistic idea of what could be achieved, thereby breaking down the trust that had been built.

Boraine's belief that religious communities had a particular role to play was echoed at a recent inter-faith consultation led by the South African chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

Ever practical, Sheena Duncan of the South African Council of Churches recommended the constant presence of pastors at the hearings: "We must walk beside the victims and not let them walk back into the world alone. Religious congregations can create the environment in which people can speak out their pain. Unless we create occasions for people to share, healing is not going to happen."

Theologian John de Gruchy said religious communities needed to enable people to understand the dynamics of forgiveness. "Not all will be able to forgive, which doesn't mean we shouldn't engage in the process. It just makes the challenge greater."

A more radical approach of face-to-face victim-perpetrator meetings was suggested by the Rev Desmond van der Water of the United Congregational Church.

"There needs to be an exchange at an intimate level of the hurts and the actions. I remember the story of a woman in South America who wanted to forgive, but she couldn't forgive a system, she needed to forgive a person."

But for some victims, such as Livingstone Mxenge, brother of slain activist Griffiths Mxenge, meeting his brother's killer, Dirk Coetzee, would be out of the question.

"It would be like playing with fire. My

happened and forgive themselves. "It is normal that when you do something there is a reaction. Perpetrators are still living in fear of that reaction. Once you confront them you can begin to change."

Asked how he would deal with a perpetrator who came to him for counselling, Ds Henk Zeeman of Pretoria's Moreletta Park DRC said: "As a minister I would surprise him by saying that I am part of the sin he committed and suffer with him as an act of solidarity."

Zeeman's greater concern was that people might not have enough trust in the church to come forward for counselling. Since changing its stance on apartheid, the DRC has lost its value for many erstwhile followers.

Beyond dealing specifically with the victims and perpetrators, the commission is likely to reach every citizen in one way or another.

Donaldson sees this as an opportunity for all South Africans to pause and look at themselves before moving on; something we should have done after the elections.

Maluleka said she was astounded by how much fear she harboured. She believed there was fear on both sides and that people needed

*A special committee will be responsible for liaising with trauma centres, psychologists as well as social welfare and religious communities so that a network can be in place before, during and after the commission's sitting.*

to get together over tea or a braaivleis and talk at an informal, yet structured level. "By facing the fear together it loses its power."

People who have been able to forgive, like President Nelson Mandela and car bomb victim Albie Sachs, can serve as inspirational role models. Similar people within communities, who can explain how they have coped, need to be identified so they can be a source of strength for others.

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