

# ON THE RECORD...

---

## Sindiswa Chikunga, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Police\*

*Chandré Gould interviews Sindisiwe (better known as Sindi) Chikunga, Chair of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Police, about the work of the Committee, and what she thinks is needed to fix the problems in the South African Police Service (SAPS).*

**Chandré Gould (CG):** You have been highly praised for being a strong, fair and effective chairperson for the Committee. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to hold this position?

**Sindisiwe Chikunga (SC):** As the Committee we have a huge responsibility to hold the department (of Police) accountable on behalf of all South Africans.

Now there may be people out there who are more qualified than I am to do that, but even they rely on us to ensure that the police remain accountable.

I believe that commitment, honesty, hard work and giving your best are what will allow one to succeed. My philosophy is that with hard work and working to the best of your ability you can make things happen. I represent every South African when I work in parliament - even those who did not vote for the ANC.

This is a high calling, to serve the public. And it is not an easy job.

**CG:** Can you tell me a bit more about who you are and your path to this position?

**SC:** I was born in Muden in KwaZulu-Natal. I am the daughter of a Lutheran church pastor, Rev LD Gcaba. The child of a pastor sometimes grows up not knowing exactly where you are because you move so often. We moved from Muden to Greytown to Kopleegte.

Kopleegte was a small mission with about five houses, surrounded by farms. The school only went up to Standard 2. When my father came there he got the school to go on until Standard 4. But then from Standard 4 you had to go and stay with whoever and study further. There was nothing motivating anyone there to go on to study further, so most people didn't. But as the pastor's children we saw ourselves differently and were motivated, even though we were very young to leave home.

When I finished Standard 4 I went to Ephangweni and stayed with a German lady, a Lutheran missionary, and I went to high school. I managed to do my twelve years of school in ten years because I was promoted twice - so I couldn't have been bad at my school work.

In those years if you were black there were only a few professions open to you: teaching, nursing and going into the police. So I went into nursing. My father wanted me to teach but I chose nursing

---

\* At the time of the interview Ms Chikunga held this position. She was promoted to Deputy Minister of Transport on 12 June 2012.

instead. I studied at Edendale Nursing College and then went to work at Ngwelezane Hospital as a midwife. I enrolled with UNISA and did a degree in Nursing Education, majoring in midwifery as a teaching subject. In 1990 I started teaching and so that which my father wanted, happened, I just took a different path to teaching.

In 1992 at Embhuleni Nursing School I became the principal of that school. I continued studying through UNISA and got my Honours degree and then did my Masters in midwifery through the University of Pretoria. My degree included major subjects such as management, community health nursing, social science, psychology and of course Midwifery as a teaching subject.

In the places where we stayed (as I grew up) I could see that something was wrong, but didn't know what it was. My father would pray with us every day and in his prayers he would ask God to be with Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki and Oliver Tambo, but we didn't know who these people were. When we had to pray we would mention the same names, sometimes getting them mixed up, just saying them to impress our father. But in high school I started to see that something was very wrong. In grade 11 our maths teacher left and there was no maths teacher. We wanted to study maths so badly, and close by in Estcourt there were white maths teachers but they could not come and teach us. How can things be so wrong? If there are children that want to learn and teachers available, why can't they teach them?

Then 1976 came and everyone was involved in protest. We also had an activist teacher. At the same time we put on a play titled "Ngiyazisa Ngomntanami", and I played the part of this child who was murdered, so through that I got to know what it was to be in South Africa at that time. Subsequently I served in the DCO Makiwane Youth League, ANC at branch level, at regional levels and in the Provincial Executive Committee.

I have two grown sons. One is a civil engineer and the other has just qualified as an architect.

So that is who I am.

**CG:** The police portfolio committee has probably been in the public eye more than any other over the past year since serious allegations of mismanagement and corruption emerged against high ranking officers, and even the Minister. The public and media clearly have high expectations of the Committee in dealing with these problems. How do you see your role in this regard?

**SC:** Our role is to oversee the department and hold it accountable for how it uses public funds and implements policy. If there are allegations against people in the department it is our responsibility to deal with that as well. We do this through monitoring how the department deals with it internally, and how other monitoring institutions are drawn in to investigate and address the problem (such as the Public Protector, the Inspector General of Intelligence and the National Prosecuting Authority). We are monitoring progress in this regard. It is important to mention that the secret service fund is the responsibility of the Joint Standing Committee on State Security.

**CG:** What do you think is required in order to restore stability and public confidence in the SAPS?

**SC:** The Constitution mandates the police to fight crime. If they are doing that it would give people confidence. But who the police members are and what they actually do every day is important. We need to have people who are credible, and who have the right skills for fighting crime, at station level.

Achieving complete satisfaction with the police service might be very difficult for many reasons. Crime is a very emotional issue. So, if your house is broken into and you call the police you expect them to be there as soon as you put down the phone. At the time even a short wait is like a year. So, even if the police come within a reasonable period, or couldn't come immediately for a good reason, such as if they were called to a more serious crime, then the person who called them to the house breaking won't be satisfied.

What is important for us is to find out whether the police are doing what they should be doing. So we

need to ask: of the 16 000 people murdered, how many people have been arrested in relation to those murders, and what is the conviction rate? That is the crux of the matter. We need to know also that the courts are processing cases properly.

The one thing that I cannot accept about how the police are operating now relates to the appointment of some Deputy National Commissioners. We have seen that people are appointed at that level by the National Commissioner without even having been interviewed for the job. If there was one thing I would like to change today it would be the section of the law that allows the National Commissioner to appoint people to even the position of Deputy National Commissioner (DDG) without following procedures. It should be the exception that the National Commissioner exercises his power as per the Act, but it is the norm now. How sure are we that people who are being appointed at that level can actually do the job? I think this is wrong, unjust and should not be allowed.

That is why we want the White Paper on Policing to come to Parliament as quickly as possible. We would like to conduct public hearings all over the country, make this a massive project to change the SAPS for once and for all.

**CG: The SAPS Amendment Bill was another matter that brought a great deal of public attention to the Committee. Why was the Committee adamant that the Hawks should remain within the SAPS?**

**SC:** First, corruption, organised crime and commercial crime are all crimes. The SAPS is mandated to fight crime. We therefore need a unit in the SAPS that can investigate organised crime, commercial crime and corruption. I am not for or opposed to having another entity, such as a new Chapter 9 institution that can also deal with corruption. In fact if you read the report of the National Planning Commission it also says that we could have a number of entities looking into corruption. But I don't believe it's wrong to have such a directorate in the SAPS. We have tried our best to strengthen the SAPS Amendment Bill,

both in terms of the requirements of the Constitution and in terms of what we believed was best for the Directorate.

I have no mercy for anyone involved in corruption.

**CG: What is your opinion of the role of civil society in relation to the work of the Committee, and what would you like to see done differently?**

**SC:** We work with many civil society organisations and I personally hold them in high regard. My own take is that we would like to see civil society organisations that are not politically influenced. When they come before the Committee it is important for us to see that they are not influenced by any ideology or party politics. That is because you can't really work with organisations that are not objective, but who take political sides. We need a balanced view from civil society organisations.

We don't have time to conduct research, but there are organisations that do that. When they present their findings we need to see that they are scientific and unbiased and that their methodologies are rigorous. We have had organisations presenting the findings of research that amount to opinions - we can't use that.

Later this year we will invite organisations to make submissions about the detective service and present case studies about what other countries are doing to improve their detective services. It will be key to our work to have that information.

**CG: What are some of the challenges faced by the committee, and how do you think these could be addressed?**

**SC:** Parliament is parliament and it has a set way of doing things. For example, we have one day a week to sit as a Committee - on a Tuesday from 9am to 1pm. Now if for example you have invited Provincial Commissioners to come and brief you that is not enough time.

Another challenge comes from what we have seen at police stations. When we visit police stations, and particularly their Section 13 stores (where they

keep physical evidence) we see that many police stations are in a bad state. We see that the archives where they keep dockets are badly managed in many stations. Then we make recommendations. We have been saying the same thing over and over and over again, but nothing changes. We could call for another institution to investigate (like the Public Protector), but ultimately that won't help if the police are not able and willing to change and address the problem.

We do have means that we can use to force them. Just now we have noted an irregular appointment of a Major General and we asked the Public Service Commission to investigate that appointment.

Issues related to promotions, for instance, are disturbing. We have decided to call the department and unions to a meeting where this matter will be clarified. For now, it looks bad.

**CG:** Is there anything that you would like to add in closing?

**SC:** I really believe that within the SAPS we have good police members, who are excellent and who are doing their work. But I believe we can do better. Huge resources have been allocated to the police and it is only reasonable for us to demand value for money.

I also want to say that as Chair of the Committee I have the best team working with me, irrespective of political affiliation. When we conduct oversight visits to police stations we don't sit in a boardroom; we go out to visit areas of the station e.g. Community Service Centres, we open the domestic violence registers, we go into the SAPS 13 stores and archives, we ask for dockets, and see how long it takes for them to get to us. We can only do this if we work as a team and if we are prepared to work hard. My team does this.