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NN: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

MPS: Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni

## Interview with Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni

NN: We are doing an interview with Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni on behalf of SAHA, and the time now is ten to six and this is our first interview. Uncle Prince can you please introduce yourself?

MPS: Thank you Nonhlanhla, my name is Mncedisi Prince Sibanyoni and I reside here at Endulwini section in Tembisa, where you have come to interview me.

NN: Ok, thank you. Can you please brief us about the time you were growing up and where were you born?

MPS: I was born in the year 1965 in Randfontein a place called Ibhongweni township. Then I grew up in Rustenburg in the rural area called Khaya khulu, ja, in a place called Khaya khulu, a rural area in Rustenburg - that is where I've spent half my life there. Then I came to Tembisa in 1977 where my parent got the place, then I've been involved with here in Tembisa in many activities, ehh, starting from the time were I was a soccer player in different clubs around Tembisa, big and small teams, then later on, ehh, I attended my primary school here in Tembisa in Difateng section at Setloana Primary School.

NN: Just to take you back a bit, how was Randfontein when you were growing up?

MPS: Ehh, I don't have a clue about Randfontein because... but I'm made to believe that I was born in Randfontein then my mother took me to her mother in Rustenburg. I suppose I was still very young so I don't have a clear life as to how was the life in Randfontein, but ehh... I use to visit the very same place now when I was getting older but no longer staying there but my uncles were still there, ehh... the place on its own, it was under the mine, ehh... it was more like a compound - "bayibiza ngokuthi yi nkomponi", something like that - and it used to accommodate people who were working in the mines as my granddad also, ehh... my mother's father was working in the mines so it looked a bit shady so to say it. What I remember about the place it was a house inside but ehh... the walls outside were covered by, you know, the iron, the iron zoos... [Inaudible] corridors, what, what, yes, so that's all I can remember about the place.

NN: So in Khaya Khulu at Rustenburg?

MPS: Ohh...Khaya Khulu was a very, very, you know, a frustrating place, it was a...as I've said that, it is a rural area, it now falls under the North West Province, life was very very hard. Life in that area taught one, you know, to be an adult while you were still young, because, I'm saying that because you had to perform things that were supposed to be performed by adult people, if I may give you an example of what I'm talking about, ehh... I started, you know, to be responsible at an age of ten, ten years if you can take a child from here in the township, a child of ten years still playing on the street, but I was more like a...by that age I was more responsible then, when I talk of being responsible you, you know when you are from school ehh...you've got some serious chores to take care of, while being that, you have to cook at an age of ten, you have to collect fire woods at an age of ten in the veld, you have to travel by feet getting water somewhere in the central area with a bucket on your head and at an age of twelve I was able to drive a tractor and then when you come back from school the tractor is waiting for you, to take a tractor to go and cultivate or plough the *mielie* (maize) field in a very remote area, we're talking about twenty kilometres from where we stay. You would work between two o'clock and ten o'clock in the evening, yeh...so those were types of responsibilities I

would talk about so they were more like a part of the chores that as a child growing up in the rural area you had to perform.

NN: And what did the parent say, because it seems like you did all the work.

MPS: Ehh...my parent were here in the golden city, Johannesburg (laughs), working so the reason that no one has to take a responsible life at an early age it is because we were raised by our granny, and there were no boys. I happened to be the older boy who were in the house, so we were raised by the granny and an old lady who cannot do all these jobs that I've already mentioned, you cannot expect a granny to go look after the head of cattles in the veld, get some fire woods in the veld, get some water and all the stuff, you know. So at the same time also my grandmother, she was a person who had an ill health problem so she would spend most of time being in and out Johannesburg, that's where she was attending treatment of her heart problem, so you will find a situation whereby ehh...I would raise, I mean, I would monitor the house and then I would be left with two young girls which were Nonjebo and Nomalungelo so partly they were also raised by me. So I would make it a point that at five o'clock in the morning I've already woke up; I will make it a point that before they go to school they've got hot water, they've eaten their breakfast, you see, and then I would make it a point that when they come back from school, ehh...they've got food to eat after school, I would cook supper for them and all the stuff, so you can imagine if I was ten, the ehh...Nonjebo was five and Nomalungelo was less than that, you understand, but ehh...I've managed, you know, to be there for them. Also at some certain intervals I would be a kid and still be able to go and play, yeh...

NN: And then in terms of work, was your grandmother not working?

MPS: Ehh...my granny would do some of the work but as prescribed by the doctor, she didn't have to work hard, as I've mentioned that she had a heart problem, so also it would depend on the conditions of the day, on how the weather is, in that particular time when it is too hot it becomes unhealthy for her, ehh...when it is too cold, also you understand, so yes, granny would do this and that but at the same time, ehh...she had her own philosophy believing that, ehh...she needs to train us to be strong, that was the perception, in fact that is the perception that is still prevailing now in those rural areas that, you know, you don't do everything for the kids, teach children, you know, to look after themselves, yeh. Yes, sometimes no, she would teach us how to clean the house, sometimes we'll do the laundry then she'll do a follow up, look at them up, this one you didn't wash it properly, you were supposed to do like these, you know, the soap, you must use these measurements and all that kind of stuff, so in an eggshell I would say that ehh...all that I did at that particular time before I came to Tembisa, for me, it taught me life. Up until today I am able to sustain life because of that, if maybe you can look if you can compare what I've just said to you and take a child of my age or lower age that is born and bred here in Johannesburg, you'll find that some of them, their parents are still taking care of them, in terms of doing their laundry and they can't do anything so...

NN: And you've talked about like...you attended school at Ahhh...

MPS: Setloana

NN: Rustenburg

MPS: Yes part of my lower primary

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NN: ... [Inaudible] which year and what school was it?

MPS: Ehh...the school I've attended it was Khaya Khulu Primary School and then another thing ehh...exciting that maybe you would want to know about me attending school then, you know it is about...how can I put it, you know getting to school during those time it was difficult, the school you know, consist of some very few... [Inaudible]

NN: Yeh...

PMS: As I was saying that there is something very fascinating about me attending the primary school then, (laughs) the school you know it was a two block school that is made of mud, ehh... I grew up in a time whereby you would have to attend classes on different times, there would be those learners that will come in between...as from eight o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock and then others will get in at eleven o'clock until two o'clock and then you would find a situation where in case of a school hall then there would be some partition that divide the hall and then each classroom consist of two, each classroom consist of two standards, different standards.

NN: In each classroom like...

PMS: Yes, say for example that, ehh...in this sitting room that we are in now we've got a grade one and a grade two in that dining room, then we've got a grade ehh...standard one and standard two, so now that I'm an adult, I'm trying to figure as to what type of an education we were given, because you would find that there is standard two this side and standard one on the other side. You are doing one thing because the teacher is one, but is teaching you one thing but there [are] different standards, you know, so I grew up in such ehh...circumstances and then when I was doing standard four which is grade what these days? Is grade six now, yes, and then I came this side in Tembisa.

NN: Which year was that?

MPS: Years... not 1977, I came here in year 1977 when my parent got this place, but I began to attend school here in 1980, yes, a primary school and then...

NN: If I may ask, like where you not living with your parents?

MPS: Ehh... as I've said to you that my parents got this property in 1977, so you know in the olden days during the apartheid era, you know all this things, the payments, so many people must be in a place and so on, so the only person that had a property here in Tembisa as early as 1972, it was my uncle. So it was a four room house but it housed something like, ehh...maybe eight adults, you know, so you can imagine the conditions there and also I will believe that in the olden days, you know, our parents were like, some of the parents, not all of them, that it's better you know to raise the children in the rural areas unlike here in the urban areas. But the real reason as to why didn't I live with them, I'm not too sure but I'm assuming that it was a factor of space as at some stage my mother used to work as a domestic worker staying where she was working and you know the whites then, they didn't want the black children to stay there and stuff, you know all the Group Area Act stuff, yeh...but up until then that they've got their own place then they fetched us.

NN: Like they fetched you and the...

MPS: Yes it was myself and my younger sister, Nomalungelo, and then another factor that made us to come to Tembisa is that it was also the issue of my grandmother and ill health, you know, it was getting serious that now she couldn't look after children at all, so even the very same year that we came in 1980 with her because now she couldn't really make it to be on her own, she needed someone to look after her up until she passed on because of the very heart problem.

NN: So you then came in here?

MPS: Then now I'm starting a new life in Tembisa, though I used to come to Tembisa during school holidays, but now it was a completely new ball game for me, ehh... a rural boy coming to stay in the urban areas, ehh... it was, at the beginning, it was very difficult, you know, ehh... to transform, ehh...changing the atmosphere, you know, I grew up in the homelands, I don't know much about the urban life, I don't know much about the cars, I know the cattles, you know.

NN: (Laughs)

MPS: Ehh...that is a typical rural life so, ok, we stayed in here. They got me a school where I did my grade six, ja...but lucky I got to adapt in that environment and it wasn't that difficult, you know, I had friends at school and coming from a rural area to an urban area there is something that I didn't know I can play it, I never knew that I can play soccer (laughs) up until...

NN: So you've never played soccer before?

MPS: No, it was always work so not at all, so even at school, yes, there were some soccer games and there was a soccer team but ehh...from where I grew up, my dream, we didn't have much to socialise and check which talents you have because at an early age, I could clean a house and all this stuff. Now I'm here in Setloana Primary School where I met different people, then they asked me that, 'Can you run?', and I was very good in running, you can imagine chasing the cows (laughs) so that one I excelled, then, 'Can you play soccer?' 'Not sure about that, I've never played soccer in my life.' 'So ok, fine, we will try you.' Then they gave me that opportunity, then also I excelled in soccer now, I've never know that I can play soccer. I used to see people playing soccer and I thought these people must be crazy, up until I was tested. Ever since then I was a very good soccer player, I used to play for different clubs, you know. I was good at the centre back, I was good, you know, ehh... forward as well, which then, now soccer was something that, more like it gave me a name around the Tembisa people, because now most of sport people began to recognise me all over, I mean all the schools, all the primary schools and the high schools, you know, they became to know me that there is somebody called Prince that good, can play soccer like mad. Okay, I played soccer and somewhere, I used to have friends, let me put it like that I used to have friends who had never had an interest in soccer, ehh...their interest were in politics. We would meet at school as friends but after school, ehh...we would take different ways, I would for a soccer practice then they would attend meetings there at Cubeni at...you see, the shops at Thabethe shops? There is a big hall there at the top; they call it Uncles Ben...

NN: There at the top?

MPS: Yes that's where they would spend time there, then one day one of my friends who is a doctor today, Makah's Dr Simiso...

NN: Yes

MPS: ... [Inaudible] somewhere at Moriting, there is a surgery there, then by then I was here in Tembisa High School now and then he said to me, "Chief ehh...can you go with us, ehh... in our meeting, to attend a meeting?" I say, "No, why not let me go?" Then I went in there on my arrival there you know it was a first time I heard people, you know, mentioning Mandela's name and I was like, wow, these guys are brave, you know...

NN: (Laughs)

MPS: My granny told me that you must never mention that name in your life, the whites will kill you, then for the very first time they go like talking about Mandela, the blah blah, the councillor and all the other stuff, then I began also to develop an interest now on politics and slowly now I'm moving out of soccer now ehh...attending meetings there, what I remember one time when I arrived there, I used to clean that hall alone. They would sit there and I would clean and arrange the chairs for people to sit and then it ended up becoming my chores again that I must, you see (laughs)

NN: (Laughs)

MPS: So as these meetings progressed, then they gave me a responsibility. They said, "Comrade Prince, your job here is to maintain order." I was like an usher sitting at the door at church. So I was like an usher, I would sit there as the meeting progresses, I will check people that, you know, are causing disorder in the meeting and the comrade that would be talking, you know, doing all the funny stuff then I would go like a policeman, "Comrade...comrade!! Order, laph, comrade"

NN: (Laughs) like your parents knew that you were involved in politics?

MPS: No they've never knew, up until I was wanted by the police and then later on I began to participate now in those meetings, then later on, ehh... in Tembisa High School, then we decided that ohh...there was the election of the SRC, then I got in the top five, in the executive committee as an organiser and then now my life changed completely. I became an executive member of SRC in Tembisa High School. The very same year I became an executive committee of the Tembisa Youth Congress (TEYCO), ehh... having being involved in those activities now, it puts me on the spotlight now, the system began to be after me [the police] because in the mid-eighties there were some series of strikes, yeh...that were happening. If you still remember we had only four high schools in Tembisa - it was Tembisa High, Boitumelong, Jiyane and Masisebenz, it was still that side, so I began to organise students, organise meetings and mass meetings then I...after the state president PW Botha declared the state of emergency, I was in and out prison ehh... both in Modderbee and somewhere in Isando, they called it the Section 29 Security Act, if you still remember it.

NN: Now your parents knew that you were involved?

MPS: Now they knew that I was involved, because now they would have some sleepless nights. Sometimes they would come at night looking for me. I would ran away and hide at Mr Maseko's place in the grapes tree and they wouldn't see me and all that stuff, ehh...now ehh...after the state of emergency, I got arrested every now and then, you know, and then on the other hand they've got the Section 29 Security Act also I would be arrested under those acts, and then they don't take you to Modderbee, then you will be somewhere in Isando, they would touch you, doing all these thing so

while still doing that I got recruited now ehh...to be on the ANC operatives, underground operatives then I...

NN: When was it?

MPS: I don't remember exactly which year was it, but it was still in the eighties and then now I participated and trained, ehh...as an underground missionary of Umkhonto We Sizwe, I've executed some certain task and all the stuff and then, now the system was behind me, fully, now fully. I remember at one stage the Minister of Law and Order; I know that today you know the Minister of Safety and Security, in those days it was law and order, Mr De Grange, issued an order that, you know, because I was running away, I used to be around Tembisa, around Johannesburg and somewhere in the KZN running away from the police so the comrades would take me all over the show hiding me and all the stuff. Then I remember one time the Minister of Law and Order, Mr Louis De Grange, then issued an order that, you know, if they police happen to get me they mustn't arrest me they must kill me that was an order from the government, but ehh...I have managed to move around they didn't get me up until the last day that we got our democracy then another thing I've learned now about Tembisa, putting politics of Tembisa alone and then ehh...I've served after the 1994 or in the build up to '94... I've served in different structures most of them it was a civic movement ehh... in the civic I began to learn more about Tembisa so I began to understand where does this township come from, what are the problems faced by this township and where it is going from here so that experience I've got it once I was involved with the civic structures it was TRA (Tembisa Residence Association) which by then it had its own rivalry ehh...TCA (Tembisa Civic Association) and then within the TRA then we formed a body called CAST which is ehh...(Civic Association of Southern Transvaal) and then on that structure I served, you know, with the most prominent people the likes of Father Simangaliso Mkhathshwa I think, you know, him, he was the mayor of Tshwane the likes of Moses Mayekiso ehh... the then president of SANCO, the likes of comrade Dan Mofokeng ehh...the past MEC for housing in Gauteng Dan Mofokeng the likes of Mr Richard Mdakane somewhere in the parliament I'm not sure of his portfolio, the likes of Mohamed Dengo ehh...all those people

NN: How was Tembisa during the struggle?

MPS: Ehh...comparing it with now, you know, it was more like, you know, a very forgotten township all the things that ehh...you see today they were not there from where we are sited, this tar road was not there, this one was not here, ehh...these offices were not here, there used to be a shack there and they were selling potatoes, was a shack just here and the Rabasotho hall was there, it was an office, I understand there was a civic office before but it was burned down in '76 uprising so now they ended up using the hall. When I came in, the hall was serving as the municipal offices, so a lot of things were not there. I still remember when I got here Tembisa shopping mall was an open space - we use to play there as young boys and all the stuff and then bad...bad things about Tembisa, you know, ehh... the system, when I say the system I mean the apartheid structures, they would build beer halls all over. There were lot of barras...beer halls here in Tembisa, ehh...which the students of the eighties we believe that, you know, these beer halls were built strategically so that our fathers mustn't think anything rather than going to drink some beers there and forget that they are being oppressed and then we the youth of the eighties, we burned down all those beer halls and then ehh...there were a lot of hostels here in Tembisa, the issue of housing was very poor so to say it like, for example, Temong section was a hostel, Makhulong section was also a hostel and much as Vusumuzi was a hostel so there were a lot of immigrants, ehh...around, so you can imagine that in your own country, you are an immigrant because now you are from one province to another, like

these office here, ehh...Metro Police Office, this office, it was an immigrant office for the Xhosa speaking people and the Eastern Cape, that one electricity one next to Tembisa High School it was for the Bophuthatswana consulate, what...what then, the last one, that one, also for electrical something, it was for Buthelezi Zulu-speaking people, ehh...even life by then when I arrived, it was designed in a way that there would be an apartheid amongst ourselves so we would discriminate against each other ehh...I would remember when we play soccer somewhere at Isithama where there is a Madelakufa on weekend Saturday, ehh...Sunday afternoons, there was these Zulu guys from Mangweni which was full of Zulu speaking people, they would be coming from Temong at the hostel to see their brothers and all the stuff and then during those times you can see the Zulus coming and we take stones and throw them with.

NN: What for?

MPS: Just that he is a Zulu, ehh...fortunately there was no IFP by then so it was easy for us to deal with them but as we grow up, ehh...you feel that what we did was not good, it was because maybe we grew up seeing that apartheid era, you know, we ended up discriminating ourselves and then, ehh...another bad thing about Tembisa, ehh... the transport to town was very scarce. When I got here, the only main transport available to Kempton Park and Germiston were the taxis, I'm sorry it was the train, and when I got here I was wondering, ehh...if my parents are going to send me to town on Saturday, I had to ask my principal for a school pass, you must get a document from the principal that you are still a learner because when you get to town, the police would be there with their vans at Kempton Park Station because when you exit the bridge they would want your pass, then you must be able to produce that paper to show that you are still a student and then that school pass would have a validation date so normally it has a one day purpose more like a return ticket so those are bad memories that, ehh...one have ehh...there were some sections here in Tembisa even today when you think about those days, really, these places resemble either poverty or apartheid on its own. Places like Isithama, places like Cubeni, you know, you will never know whether it's a township or they've taken, you know, a homeland to township but at the same time I think that was how the life of the people were designed, so Tembisa by then was very small, ehh...many sections were not there when we got here. Mkhathini was not there, Hospital View was not there. When I got here the section that was being built was Montso - it wasn't there and then let alone these other sections, so you can imagine if you don't have Montso you don't have Hospital View, you don't have Mkhathini, ehh...that means Tembisa becomes small, though it was portrayed to be the second from Soweto but to me it was still small. So I feel that in terms of changing Tembisa to be what is to be, though there is not much that has been done in Tembisa, I had a lot of a contribution in trying to change the life of the people of Tembisa even in terms of developments my personal feeling, I don't think much it has being done because people are poor, rate of unemployment is high, the informal settlement are still increasing. So to me I don't feel that much, it has being done to change the lives of people. The only different that I see is that, yes it would be like that it won't be the same as the past because in the whole country things are changing, then the last thing that was scarce about this place, there were no lights, street lights, mass lights the so-called Apollo's, I remember the first one, it was close to the library it was there, somewhere there in...I mean, it was installed in nineteen 1988, I remember it, it was when we went like hoof...we can move easily at night and then there was no sanitation, sewage was not here and another difficult part about this area of us Tembisa, ehh...in the toilets, people would use the so called bucket system so you can imagine on a Sunday, you know, they've cooked...



NN: (Laughs)

MPS: Sunday meals then there they come and you are sitting outside and there comes the tractor to fetch the bucket. They would leave the passage messed up and it would go back to say now that the boys in the house, ehh...must clean all that mess and wash the bucket and take it back to the toilet, ehh...which was another bad thing about Tembisa and it was also rated amongst the last township here in Jozi, ehh...to use the bucket system, it was very...very bad, you know, I don't want to think about that experience, it was very horrible and then ehh...the taps, water taps, it was more like a luxury to have a tap inside the house or under the window. Normally water taps would be somewhere behind the toilet or in the passage, you see, so you can imagine at night you go there, you fill in the water bucket and take it to the house. When we talk of electricity the municipal officer did not install electricity in the houses which is another bad thing about Tembisa ehh...if you need electricity, you need to apply from the authorities and you pay for the cable that would be connected from somewhere and come straight to your property and which at the end of the day, it will make a situation whereby those who doesn't have money will be unable to get electricity in their houses and then those who earn better, they would be able to get electricity which I believe that it was another matter of classing people of which now we've got a sector for the people that they believe they are rich because they can pull electricity to their houses unlike today you don't have to go miles to where you buy cable because they are in the front door of your property so it just up on you that you electrify the property, so those are some of the stories that I remember by then Tembisa, those are some of the horrible stories that I still ehh...remember about this place, even when it was like that, ehh...as a growing up child life was good, so if today somebody can ask me whether I regret to be here in Tembisa I would say, no, I don't regret.

NN: Student uprising in Tembisa?

MPS: Ehh...student uprising in Tembisa we use to dub ourselves as the student of the '80s, why I'm saying that in 1976 I was very young and also I believe that the students of 1976, they have played their part, ehh...and then they mostly, they all went to exile and then the struggle was left unattended but by the few that remained and then in the eighties then that is where we emerged, they used to call us the young lions, that is where we emerged and then it was very interesting, the 1980s uprising, you know, I believe that we were the students that were very great because we were able to face the system being apartheid, ehh...we fought it with all we've got. So our struggle started from school trying to fight the just, education system, ehh...of the day and then it expanded we politicised the entire community and then it expanded to the rent politics whereby it went as to, you know, people now don't want the black local authorities, you know, we want the so called administration and then we want our authorities to be mixed with the ones of the whites. Then going back to the school issue, I believe that the students of the '80s, they contributed a lot to the changes of this country. It went to the extent that the police were so brutal toward the students and very...very brutal. For the police or the system to kill a student, it was a very simple thing. It was more like a crashing a house fly. And then it went to an extent that the people such as Archbishop Tutu called for sanctions, it was because of what it was happening in the '80s. So we were there every corner, we fought apartheid left, right and centre, ehh... we came up with the boycotts, we boycott this and that, you know, we don't buy in town, we don't use transport and everything that were owned by the whites so to put it.

NN: So everyone was involved?

MPS: I would say not everyone but the majority, yes, they were, but at some stage, ehh...at some stage to get the people attention, we would use force, why I'm saying that, you find that if you got a stay away, there would be those who want to sneak in and then we would be there at the stations, taxi ranks, bus stations sjamboking everyone that is going to work and everyone who was coming from work. So I remember we had a two days' stay away in 1985 that was a very...very effective stay away that we have organised that stay away, it was organised by the student body, by the resident structure, ehh...by the church leaders and then we hold this area of us with a standstill, that stay away, it was somewhere in November in 1985 though I don't remember the date and then the government of the day, you know, they brought in the whole army, imagine, you know, we used to fight with stones fighting those tankers and the missiles fighting kids, but under...after that strike quite a number of young people across the country, because of, we gain expectation of the system then that is where I was able to get an underground training as well during that era, ehh...with other operators of the ANC in the country so that era, case and go in 1987, I was more like a grown up man now, I completed my grade twelve and then I had to go and work, before that another part I remember I got arrested the last time in 1987. They've issued an army to arrest one harmless person, ehh...it was somewhere in Knits by then I was studying at Soweto Phase College and Phase was then a private school which was not affiliated under department of education.

End of interview (audio-recorder battery died)

