

TEMBISA TOWNSHIP, POST-1990

On 2 February 1990, President F.W. de Klerk announced in Cape Town the lifting of the banning orders against the ANC, PAC and other political movements. Political prisoners were released, including Nelson Mandela. And those who had fled into exile were permitted to return. Political movements like the ANC and PAC re-established themselves legally by forming branches in all areas across the country. A branch was formed in Tembisa and it was chaired by Andrew Mapheto. Negotiations between the government and the ANC started.

However, during this period in Tembisa developed another phenomenon: the escalation of informal settlements. This was due to lack of housing. In 1986 it was estimated that there were 10 000 people on the waiting list for housing.¹²⁰ Rebecca Fosi Sibanyoni, who settled in Winnie Mandela settlement, remembers:

I came to this section, Winnie Mandela, in 1992. There were trees and bushes only. There were no houses. We started by building shacks. And people started to come one-by-one until we became many. Many of them came from the different sections in Tembisa. There was a man who was staying in Hospital View. He was the one who gave us permission [to live here]. We were paying him R65 and he would give us a card showing that we have paid¹²¹

Similarly, in the period leading to the 1994 national elections, Tembisa was besieged by gangsterism. One of the most notorious gangs that emerged at this stage was the Toaster gang. This gang was led by one Yster and its base was Umthambeka (This Yster should not be confused with the one who assisted Dondo Dithebe to leave the country in 1986). The gang is reported to have been formed in late 1991. And between that period and mid-1992 the Toaster gang was alleged to have killed about 15 people in Umthambeka and raped schoolgirls, robbed people. The residents of Tembisa were terrified of the gang to the extent that even patrons of shebeens stopped going to shebeens. This was after the gang had entered one of the shebeens in the township and ordered women to undress and bath in a basin full of beer, and thereafter ordered men to drink the liquor from the basin.¹²²

The gang was later linked to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and its base became Vusumuzi Hostel.¹²³ It terrorized the community and escaped back to the hostel. The reign of terror by the gang was brought to an end after its leader was murdered, but the damage wrought upon Tembisa by the gang lives on today, as was demonstrated by anonymous comments submitted to SAHA at the heritage day event in September 2011.

In 1994 the country held its first non-racial, non-sexist national elections and the ANC won. For many in the township, the 27 April was a historic and jubilant day. The Star reported that some of the residents flocked to the streets as early as 6am, singing and dancing as they approached the polling stations.¹²⁴ Linda Vilakazi, 62, said "I must vote for the first time to heal the wounds of apartheid".¹²⁵ And Mandla Mkhwanazi, 72, added "I am feeling very young once again and this vote is for my children".¹²⁶ Following the elections and the new government led by the ANC had assumed power, many of the activists who had led the struggle from the 1970s through to the 1990s were appointed into positions of authority in the new government.





