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Author: OKUHLE HLATI

NATION

Lusikisiki murder victims laid to rest as families grieve

OKUHLE HLATI
okhule.hlati@inl.co.za

THE grieving families of the 18 victims killed in a brutal shooting in Lusikisiki, believe the journey towards healing can only start when all perpetrators are behind bars.

They laid to rest their loved ones in different areas at the weekend.

Gunmen stormed into two homesteads in Ngobozana village last month and fired at the victims while they were sleeping. They were preparing for a traditional ceremony.

Forty-five year old Siphosoxolo Myekethe made his first appearance in the Lusikisiki Magistrate's Court on Wednesday in connection with the murders following his arrest on Monday at his home in Mthimde Location, Mamfengwini area.

Myekethe was also charged with one count of possession of an unlicensed firearm, an AK47 assault rifle.

Myekethe was out on parole at the time of the murders after his previous convictions for murder and escaping while awaiting trial.

Eastern Cape police commissioner Nomthetheli Mene said: "The investigation is still ongoing, we are looking for additional suspects, about three, but there might be more."

One of the family representatives, Nkosinathi Mhathu said they were devastated and still seeking closure.

"The one person arrested is indeed a breakthrough that has brought some relief as we are hoping to get answers. We want to know who he committed the heinous crime with because we believe he did not commit the crime alone.

"We also want to know the reason for it. The families are owed an explanation so that healing can start. As a family we also want to express gratitude for the support," said Mhathu.

Premier Oscar Mabuyane said justice will be served.

"The individuals responsible for this heinous crime will be found and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Law enforcement is working tirelessly to ensure that these criminals are brought to justice and we will not rest until that happens.

"In response to this tragedy, we are taking decisive action to address the crime that has plagued our community for too long. Starting today, we will provide vehicles to support our community policing forums, giving them the tools to respond swiftly to criminal activities and better protect our neighbourhoods," said Mabuyane.

He said they are also working closely with Police Minister Senzo Mchunu to improve communication equipment for the forums and for the community to be better connected to law enforcement.

"In partnership with the Department of Public Works and the local municipality, we will install high mast lights in critical areas to deter criminals, reduce stock theft, and improve night-time safety across the community. Beyond safety, we are committed to helping families rebuild their lives.

"For the children who have lost their parents, we will ensure that their future is not compromised. The Office of the Premier, in collaboration with the Department of Education, will provide special bursaries to ensure that these children continue their education," he added.

Meanwhile A 33-year-old man was arrested and appeared in the Qumbu Magistrates' Court in connection with the murders of six Qumbu Community Policing Forum patrollers.

The group of about 16 patrollers were assembling at a local school in Tina Falls when they were attacked by gunmen.