



## Southern Africa

### GOVERNMENT

## Experiencing Apartheid in South Africa

*Lettie Khuzwayo was a nurse at a health clinic in Alexandria, a township for black South Africans on the edge of the city of Johannesburg. In this interview, conducted before apartheid ended in South Africa, she describes life in her township under the system of apartheid.*

We used to have freehold [land ownership] rights here. When they wanted to get rid of that, they decided to do it by getting rid of the husbands! The police used to wait at the corners early in the morning, take their pass [documents that all Blacks were required to carry, which stated where they could work and live], and “stamp them out.” Then you had to leave Alex [Alexandria] and go to Meadowlands. So they used to stamp every man out and tell them, “You go to Meadowlands next day.” Then they try to abolish your house and you’re moved, just like that. But certainly in all the time I’ve been here they couldn’t abolish us all . . . what they’ve done now is to buy all the land, so the little right to stay now depends on our passbook, just like everybody.

My husband was born here and his father had a property. We’re fighting now because it’s been sold to the administration [government] without our permission. In other words, they took it over at a very low price that we hadn’t agreed. We love this place. We both work here, the shops are close, our friends are near. We’ve got Pick and Pay [a grocery store] just round the corner—in Meadowlands and Diepkloof people have to go miles to the cheaper shops.

There were freehold rights here for more than a hundred years, . . . but this government is afraid of that, it gives us the power to stay. . . . We’d like to take over the township ourselves and have our own municipality [town]: the running of the place, the financing, the decisions. The roads aren’t made, the gutters are filthy, there’s only bucket sewerage. We’d like to have proper toilets and electricity . . . at the moment it’s paraffin lamp and candles, which is very expensive; and not easy when the children are at home alone. When we are away, most of the time I worry in the evening: we often get children with quite severe burns at the clinic.

Its quite different, going out to work with children at home. When they were small they had to wait outside the house after school till I got home. There was one that used to be at school at eight, and knocks off at twelve: from twelve o’clock till I got home at four he just roams around. . . .

We no longer find the police in the streets, with lorries [trucks] packed with people whose houses are going to be knocked down and abolished . . . Because the clinic is just outside the township, on the Joh’burg [Johannesburg] side, women used to come and sit here at five o’clock in

the morning in those days, so that if the police came they could say they weren't in the township. Imagine, every morning they came! They would run across the street to the clinic and the police would just look at them . . . when you ask them why, they'd say, "Now we're not in a proclaimed [off limits] area, the police cannot catch us."

We don't see so much of the police now . . . at the time there was a yard with many illegal people staying: you'd find them too outside at five in the morning, making fires with paper to keep themselves warm; they were afraid to be in their shelters in the yard in case the police came. Outside they had the chance to run! What's happened over the years is that the administration board has bought properties and come in and knocked down some of them. We did fight as a community, as well as by ourselves.

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**Understanding What You Read** After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. According to Khuzwayo, what two methods did the government use during apartheid to force residents out of certain townships?

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2. What clue does the interview give that education for black South Africans was limited under apartheid?

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3. What do you think created the "yard" that Khuzwayo refers to in Alexandria township, and why were people living on it in temporary shelters? Why does she call these people "illegal"?

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### Activity

Pressure from the United States and other nations helped end apartheid in the early 1990s. Write a letter as an American to the president of South Africa, persuading him that apartheid is wrong and should be abolished.