

At 75, ailing PAC leader remains

S defiant, unbowed

ZEPHANIA Mothopeng stood to attention. His hand was raised in the open-palm salute of the outlawed Pan-Africanist Congress. It shook slightly.

The words of the African anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel'i-Afrika*, reverberated in the crowded room at the Ipelegeng Community Centre in Soweto as the historic press conference drew to close less than 48 hours after his release from prison last weekend.

The scene was joyful but poignant. Mr Mothopeng, president of the outlawed PAC, was free, having being released from prison less than two days earlier. But the 75-year-old Africanist was clearly ailing. Even if he were not suffering from cancer, time would be running out for him.

The open-palm salute reflected his determination to continue the quest for a united Azania. The quivering hand was a sign that the struggle would be against advanced age and poor health as much as it would be against any political foes.

Wearing a jacket and tie, his sideburns reaching down before running along his cheekbones to



AFRICAN GIANT ... Zeph Mothopeng's dream undimmed.

join his moustache in Edwardian fashion, Mr Mothopeng did not mince words.

"If I had my way, I would be resting in bed," the PAC presi-

dent said, his clear, resonant voice hinting at oratorical power of younger days.

"But I must stress that it is only my body that is weak and not my spirit. I am as determined to fight for the liberation of Azania today as I was on the day I joined the liberation struggle as a young man."

It was typical of the man, of his political tenacity. Having spent nearly half of the last 30 years in jail for refusing to abandon the Africanist cause, Mr Mothopeng was not about to retire gracefully to his deathbed.

A founding father of the PAC in 1959, he helped launch the PAC's non-violent campaign against the pass laws in 1960. It led, tragically, to the Sharpeville shootings, to the declaration of a state of emergency, to the outlawing of the PAC and to the incarceration of many of the PAC leaders.

Mr Mothopeng was one of those arrested with the PAC's first president, Robert Sobukwe. He was jailed for two years for his role in the 1960 campaign. It did not break his spirit.

In 1964 he was imprisoned for another three years after being

Libya next February.

Mr Mothopeng and Mandela share a common past: both were members of the ANC Youth League, which stood for "rallying and uniting African youth into one national front on the basis of African nationalism".

If the PAC has sometimes given an exclusive, biological definition to the term African, restricting it to the indigenous or native people of Africa, Mr Mothopeng used it in the alternative broader, inclusive sense.

"We don't look at the colour of a person," Mr Mothopeng said in reply to the question of whether whites could qualify as Africans. "We consider his convictions."

It was reminiscent of Sobukwe's definition of an African as a person who owed his loyalty only to Africa and who accepted democratic rule of the African majority.

On the prospect of unity between the PAC and the ANC, Mr Mothopeng replied: "I can only answer for the Pan-Africanist Congress. I said my first task is to unite the Azanian nation ... nation includes all the Africans. The members of other organisations are Africans, too."

Personality

ZEPH MOTHOPENG

Written by:
PATRICK LAURENCE

convicted of furthering the aims of the PAC. In 1979, he was back in jail again, having been convicted under the Terrorism Act for furthering the objectives of the PAC between 1963 and 1977.

Typically, he and his co-accused refused to plead in 1979. They would not recognise the court, asserting that it was formed under laws which the African people had no share in making.

Mr Mothopeng used his first public appearance after his release to plead for the freedom of the imprisoned leader of the rival African National Congress, Nelson Mandela. It was a gesture of political fraternity, from one African nationalist to another.

He named Mandela and the lon-

gest serving political prisoner, Mr Jeff Masemola, prisoners of conscience who symbolised the plight of political prisoners in jails throughout South Africa.

"They should be out here and working for the return of our land," Mr Mothopeng said to cries of the PAC slogan *Izwe Lethu* (Our Land). "They should be released not on grounds of compassion or mercy, but because they are held illegitimately."

By inviting Nelson Mandela to join the PAC in its struggle for the return of the land, he was reaching across ideological barriers to grasp the ANC man by the hand and saying: "Let us go forward together."

Major ideological difference exist between the PAC and the ANC. But the idea of them forming a united front, on the lines of the Patriotic Front forged by Zimbabwean nationalists, has been fomenting for some time.

It was raised again last weekend when church leaders from South Africa had talks with the ANC in Zimbabwe. It has been put on the agenda of a meeting of the liberation committee of the Organisation for African Unity in

The Natal Mercury Witness 1988

Biko death

3 December

—no-one responsible

Saturday

PRETORIA — The available evidence does not prove that the death of Mr Steve Biko was brought about by an act or omission involving an offence by any person. This was the finding yesterday by the Chief Magistrate of Pretoria Mr Marthinus Prins at the inquest into the death of the Black Consciousness leader.

In his verdict which lasted about five minutes, Mr Prins said Mr Biko's death could be attributed to head injury with extensive brain injuries followed by complications leading to renal failure.

This was the cause or likely cause of Mr Biko's death, he said. His judgment came at the end of a three-week inquest.

The actual verdict was given in less than three minutes.

Mr Prins said the inquest was held in terms of the Inquest Act (Act 58 of 1959). The person involved was Steven Bantu

Biko, approximately 30 years old, who died on September 12, 1977.

The cause or likely cause of death was head injury, followed by extensive brain injury and other complications, including renal failure.

The head injury was probably sustained on the morning of September 7 during a scuffle with security police in Port Elizabeth.

"The available evidence does not prove that death was brought about by an act or omission involving an offence by any person," Mr Prins said.

The court adjourned.

Immediately after the verdict was given the public surged out of the Old Synagogue and staged a Black Power demonstration.

Police with dogs kept a watch on the crowd.

"They have killed Steven Biko," the crowd chanted.

"What have we done? Our sin is that we are Black."

The widow of Mr Steve Biko, Mrs Nontsikelelo Biko, said she was too depressed to comment in any way on the inquest. Her immediate plans for the future were unclear, hav-

ing resigned her job as a nurse in Transkei.

The record of the Biko inquest would now go to the Attorney-General of the Transvaal as a matter of routine, a spokesman for the Department of Justice said yesterday.

It was up to the attorney-general to decide whether there should be any further investigation or whether any other action should be taken.

Asked about the possibility of an appeal, he said the Inquest Act made no provision for appeal against a finding. The only possibility was that the matter could be reviewed, but that could only happen if there was any irregularity. This had seldom, if ever, happened in South Africa's legal history.

Asked about the possibility of Mr Prins elaborating on it at a later stage, the spokesman said the Inquest Act merely required the magistrate to give his finding on the available evidence.

Meanwhile in Johannesburg at least 13 people, including members and friends of the Biko family, were detained during a security police swoop in Soweto early yesterday morning.

Brother

Mr Khaya Biko, the brother of the late Mr Steve Biko, and a cousin, Mr Solomon Biko, were detained from the home of the Rev Drake Tshenkeng in Orlando East where they were staying for the inquest into Mr Biko's death.

Mr Tshenkeng was detained on October 19 under the Internal Security Act.

Two friends of the Biko family, Mr Mandla Kopo and Mr Mike Jordaan, and the brother of the Rev Tshenkeng, Mr Junior Tshenkeng were also arrested at the same house. — Sapa.