



Press Statement: For Immediate Release

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Honouring South Africa's Whistleblowers

On 23 August, Defend Our Democracy joined the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, Courage Hub, OUTA, the Deokaran family, members of government, civil society and citizens in Winchester Hills to solemnly commemorate the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Babita Deokaran, murdered in 2021 after courageously questioning the R3-billion tender corruption at Tembisa Hospital. Defend Our Democracy was allowed to address the gathering and used the platform to honour her memory, thank the convening parties, and reaffirm the urgent need to protect those who speak up against corruption.

Addressing the crowd, Defend Our Democracy paid tribute to the Deokaran family for continuing to allow the public to stand with them in their grief, and thanked the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation for convening the commemoration, alongside Courage Hub and OUTA for their continued partnership in keeping Babita's memory, and the cause she died for, alive.

Defend Our Democracy told those gathered that Babita's death was not only a family's tragedy but a wound in South Africa's democracy, and that five years on, no one has yet been convicted for ordering her assassination. This, the organisation said, reflects a broader national failure: South Africa asks its citizens to speak up against corruption, yet repeatedly fails to protect them when they do.

We also remembered Mpho Mafole, killed for allegedly exposing corruption in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Council, and Martha Rantsofu, who recently lost her life after allegedly exposing corruption at Emfuleni Local Municipality. Their sacrifices, like Babita's, highlight the deadly consequences of standing against corruption.

The day was not only about remembrance but also about honouring all whistleblowers, past and present, who have defended our democracy and protected public resources:

- Martha Ngoye - exposed corruption at PRASA, fighting to protect billions meant for public transport.
- Cynthia Stimpel - refused to participate in looting at South African Airways, safeguarding public funds.
- Athol Williams - revealed corporate complicity in state capture.
- Mosilo Mothepu - exposed Trillian's role in the looting of Eskom.
- Bianca Goodson - courageously revealed corruption linked to the Gupta network.
- Frans Mathipa - Hawks Investigator assassinated for investigating members of the SANDF.
- Moses Phakoe - assassinated after exposing corruption in Rustenburg Municipality.
- Pamela Mabini - an assassinated community activist who also testified against the televangelist Timothy Omotoso.
- Cloete and Thomas Murray - liquidators assassinated for their role in exposing corruption at Bosasa.
- Jimmy Mohlala - killed after exposing corruption in the Mbombela Municipality linked to the 2010 World Cup stadium.
- Marumo Eric Phenya - silenced for exposing IT corruption in the Department of Home Affairs.



These individuals, alongside countless unnamed whistleblowers across municipalities, hospitals, and government departments, embody courage and integrity. They are the guardians of our democracy, ensuring that corruption does not go unchecked and that public resources serve the people.

In its address, Defend Our Democracy stressed that protection cannot be the only conversation South Africa has about whistleblowers; prevention matters just as much. Honesty, transparency, accountability and integrity, the organisation said, cannot only be values invoked after something has gone wrong, they must become the ordinary, expected standard of leadership, in government and beyond. Ethical conduct is too often treated as exceptional rather than assumed, and that culture has to change.

Defend Our Democracy also used the occasion to link Babita's legacy to its Election Watch Campaign ahead of the 4 November local government elections, telling attendees that the same principle that should have protected Babita, citizens watching, participating, and refusing to look away, is the principle being built into how South Africans observe the vote. Thousands of citizen observers are being trained and deployed nationwide to stand watch at polling stations, because a democracy left unwatched is a democracy left vulnerable.

Yet too often, whistleblowers are met with intimidation, isolation, and violence. Defend Our Democracy used the platform to renew its call for:

- Stronger legal protections for whistleblowers.
- Safe reporting mechanisms that shield them from retaliation.
- Swift justice for those who orchestrate violence against whistleblowers.
- A culture of accountability where truth-tellers are celebrated, not punished - and where ethical leadership is normalised as the standard, not the exception.

As Defend Our Democracy remembered Babita Deokaran and all whistleblowers, alive and departed, the organisation recommitted itself to building a South Africa where courage is not fatal, and integrity is not silenced. Their sacrifices must not be in vain.

Defend Our Democracy stands with whistleblowers. Their fight is our fight.

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