

South African police attack naked assault victim

Thabo Seseane Jr.
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Users of social media channels were aghast last Friday over a video showing South African Police Service (SAPS) officers beating, throttling and kicking a naked man who had just been assaulted in the Cape Town Central Business District. The incident occurred in Riebeeck Street last Thursday morning.

The following day, an office worker who filmed part of the assault from a nearby building spoke to the *Cape Argus*. “What you see on the video is only a fraction of the assault,” she said. “It went on for about half an hour in total.”

She said it appeared that the victim, identified by the *Independent Online* as Nigerian national Clement Emekensha, had been assaulted even before the SAPS turned up, as she arrived on the scene before them. At that stage, she says, Emekensha was already lying naked near the doorway of the Sky Sports Bar in Riebeeck Street, next to a pile of clothes. She saw him get up and put on his underwear, but the rest of his clothing had been taken into the night club.

In the video, two Central City Improvement District (CCID) officers and a private security guard are also shown participating in the assault next to a parked Volkswagen Golf. An SAPS officer sprays mace in Emekensha’s face. A police officer and a CCID officer then pull Emekensha away from the car and farther into the street, where the CCID officer yanks Emekensha’s briefs down. The nude victim struggles to get away, but the two police officers grab his wrists, twisting his arm. One of the officers then throttles Emekensha with his right hand before pinning his hands behind his back.

The second SAPS officer then very deliberately punches Emekensha three times in the groin. The victim bends over in pain as the police officer holding him from behind jabs his elbow into Emekensha’s back.

The same officer who punched his genitals then kicks Emekensha in the groin twice, as a CCID officer holds the victim’s arms behind his back. The security guard helps the officer. Emekensha is pulled towards a waiting police van. He is kicked as he tries to get in. All the while he is bleeding from a gash on the back of his head, which witnesses assert was inflicted by the SAPS.

In the video, a witness is heard shouting, “Police brutality! That’s not how you treat a person! Why are you kicking him? Why are you kicking him? That’s the only reason why you’re in the news all day!”

At that point, one of the SAPS officers threateningly points his finger at the person holding the camera. Then he marches towards the entrance of the building from which the incident was filmed.

Some of the office workers are defiant by now. “He can come up! He can come up, man,” one of them is heard saying on the video.

The *Cape Argus* eyewitness identified one of the officers, having read his surname from a name badge. She said the officer arrested one of her co-workers for “interfering with police work” after noticing that the incident was being filmed.

The Western Cape SAPS announced the suspension of both officers on Friday pending an investigation. On Saturday, Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) spokesman Moses Dlamini said the SAPS warrant officers, aged 42 and 45, were arrested on Friday night. The two now face assault charges, though other charges could be added, Dlamini said.

IPID has a poor record of securing convictions against police officers facing misconduct charges, even as the police watchdog recorded a 218 percent increase in police assaults in the 2012/13 financial year. According to IPID’s October 2013 report, there were:

- 275 deaths in police custody
- 415 deaths as a result of police action
 - 641 complaints of the discharge of an official firearm
- 141 rapes by a police officer
- 22 rapes in police custody
- 50 cases of torture
- 4,047 cases of assault
- 116 cases of corruption
- 127 cases of non-compliance with section 29 of the IPID Act, which compels police to report alleged crimes to the IPID within 48 hours.

IPID is now headed by Robert McBride, who was arrested in 2006 and faced charges of drunken driving and attempting to obstruct the course of justice. He was chief of the Ekurhuleni metro police at the time. (See “Robert McBride appointed as South Africa police watchdog: The ANC’s ‘answer’ to police brutality.”) In parliamentary exchanges around McBride’s appointment, Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa said the image of the SAPS was “in tatters” and that McBride was the right person to correct it.



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