

Sikuvile Awards 2017: Recognising the soldiers of the truth

By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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The Standard Bank Sikuvile Journalist of the Year 2017, says he received death threats as well as bribes when he was working on the story that earned him the Award.



All the winners of the Standard Bank Sikuvile Journalism Awards 2017.

City Press' Siphon Masondo, was one of a number of journalists, photographers, columnists, cartoonists and graphic artists to be recognised at The Standard Bank Sikuvile Journalism Awards 2017 on Thursday evening.



All the Standard Bank Sikuvile Journalism Awards 2017 winners!

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Crowned Journalist of the Year for his Investigative story *Watergate*, Masondo says it was not an easy story. "I did a lot of traveling and lived in Lesotho for weeks, spending time away from my wife and my two young children. As if that was not difficult enough, I also received death threats and then bribes."

He says despite these challenges getting the story was worth it. "It is rewarding to know that this work has not been in vain and then to be recognised for it, is wonderful."

Every journalist is an investigative journalist

The SA Story of the Year *Life Esidimeni* is especially topical with the inquest currently taking place. Suzanne Venter from *Rapport* whose investigation was in part responsible for the inquest to be initiated, says when she stumbled on the story, she did not realise it would be such a big story. "At first it was just a Facebook message of someone asking for help, but then as I dug deeper I discovered it was much more than that."

Like Masondo she faced many obstacles. The story developed slowly so it was also difficult in the beginning to convince the newspaper that it was a story. “Newspapers today do not have the money or the time for investigative journalism, but my news editor says every journalist is an investigative journalist.”

Another obstacle was that often her stories were cut because of legal issues. “By the time the MEC admitted 36 people had died, we knew the number was higher than that. Yet, when I interviewed her, she looked me in the eyes and told me no-one had died.”

Venter, who has worked in public relations, done layout and written about celebrities, says this story was her calling. “For me it became about making a difference.”

Commenting on the winning entries, convenor judge, Mathatha Tsedu, says the concern for the weakest in our society permeates the winning entries this year. “While there were political entries given the overbearing political developments in our country, winning stories, particularly in hard news and investigative journalism deal with concerns of ordinary people.”

The futility of suppressing freedom and ideas

Newcomer, Award winner, Botshilo Maake, who is hearing impaired, did not expect to receive the Award. “This is my first year in media and it has been an amazing year and this is the cherry on the top. I am loving working with the team in navigating the changing landscape with digital and social media. It is fast paced and challenging, but I am looking forward to it.”

The Allan Kirkland Soga Lifetime Achiever Award went to Juby Mayet. This was Mayet’s second award of the day, says her daughter, Zainab Mayet, who with her daughter, Juby’s granddaughter, accompanied her. “She is very inspiring, but when people tell her that she does not understand why they think so and says she is just a nobody. I tell her you are not a nobody; you are the only Indian woman journalist and part of the Struggle when other Indian women were home making rotis.”

Tsedu paid tribute to Mayet and other journalists who were at the forefront of the Struggle. “Some of them sit in the room with us tonight. They are testimony to the futility of suppressing freedom and ideas.”

Tonight, he continued, “we gather here to remember those days, but also to pay homage to today’s soldiers of the truth, the mujahedin of verified journalism in the face of the proliferation of false news, false outlets and hired Twitter brigades.”

Fake news

The theme of the Awards fake news, was addressed by Thulani Gcabashe, chairperson, Standard Bank Group. “The average person looks at their mobile phone 88 times a day. But while mobiles give people access to information in various forms from blogs to news sites etc. these are of varying quality.”

It becomes very difficult for the average person to decipher what is real and credible and what is fake news. “This instant access to information should come with a warning sign to remind us that just because it is written down, does not make it

true. Just as sharing something will not make it the truth.”

What chance does the truth stand in a world where there is an appetite for drama and controversy? In this saturated fake news environment, he notes that one needs to value reliable and credible news. “That is why more and more people are willing to pay for news. *The New York Times*, in the first quarter this year, had 380,000 subscribers.”

He adds that in our country, truthful news is important. “That is why Standard Bank is proud to be part of the Sikuville Awards. You, the journalists are our everyday heroes, the defenders of truth, decency and democracy.”

Click [here](#) to view gallery of 2017 Standard Bank Sikuville Journalism Awards.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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