

I didn't celebrate death - Phiyega

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Rustenburg - The police team who shot dead striking mineworkers were thanked for following protocol, national police commissioner **Riah Phiyega** said on Tuesday.

She was speaking in Rustenburg before the Farlam commission of inquiry into last year's 16 August shooting in Marikana that left 34 mineworkers dead in a wage-related strike.

Phiyega denied that a statement she issued the next day celebrated the death of the miners.

"The message I was sending was that we are mourning the tragedy... I was thanking them for following protocol... and that was separate to the mourning," she said.

"I did not celebrate death."

In her statement last year, Phiyega said: "I want to thank you for what you did... enduring the challenges.

"All that we did was do our job... We had a plan and that plan was disrupted."

On Tuesday, she said earlier reports that she had simply thanked police were quoted out of context.

"That is why I asked for this commission to play the whole tape because the snippet shown quoted me out of context," she said.

Be more responsible

Phiyega was also asked about a statement by Warrant Officer Hendrich Wouter Myburgh.

In this, Myburgh said he was present on the day of the shootings and he had witnessed another officer shoot an injured miner.

"After most of the shooting has stopped I entered into Koppies searching for suspects to arrest. I found about three injured people lying down and turned away from them searching for other suspects," said Myburgh in a statement.

"I suddenly heard a gunshot behind me... As I turned I saw a NIU constable who is unknown to me putting his side firearm in his leg holster while he was standing next to the injured [man] I first met who was having a jersey wrapped around his arm.

"I asked him... what is going on... He replied by saying they deserve to die and he moved away," said Myburgh.

He said he could not identify the officer facially and could not read his surname on his name tag.

Phiyega said she was aware of Myburgh's allegations and said she and two other two officers spoke to him shortly after these allegations.

She said she encouraged Myburgh to write a statement and submit it to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate.

George Bizos, for the Legal Resources Centre and the Bench Marks Foundation, asked whether Myburgh had feared to expose the police officer he spoke about.

Phiyega said this was why she referred the matter to the IPID for further investigation.

She told the commission she did not consult any other police officer about the incident as there was no other officer who made similar allegations.

Bizos asked Phiyega if she doubted Myburgh's statement.

"What worried me is that this is a warrant officer talking about a constable. As a warrant officer, he is a senior and I would have expected him to be more responsible [to note his name and face]. That worries me," said Phiyega.

The public hearing by the commission is part of its inquiry into the Marikana events.