



August 2017

## Fikile Mbalula: Protest critic

In another national-local overlap, this month's Personality is a national political player (both as Minister of Police, as well as an influential figure within the ANC) who has expressed strong views on the illegality of protests and some of their motives. This Personality of the Month considers Mbalula's views and how they might impact on local government.

### Hard-talking firebrand

Former leader of the ANC Youth League (from 2004 to 2007), Mbalula, who is also known by the nickname "Razzmatazz", is not known as someone who minces his words, and his relatively new role as Police Minister has proved no exception - with Mbalula calling for a crackdown on criminals raising fear that he supports a shoot-to-kill ethos:

"Anyone who kills a policeman will meet fire with fire. No police officer will die in vain.... I don't want to use that word, 'Shoot and do whatever', but I'm saying we use fire with fire. You are not given those guns as toys. You are given those guns to use them to protect the nation and protect yourselves... Fight back, fire with fire... Tooth for a tooth, nail for nail" ([www.dailymaverick.co.za](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za)).

Protesters are not spared from this hardened attitude; during protests in Vuwani, Mbalula argued "We will not allow you to destroy property. Rule of law, rule of law, rule of law must prevail... If they don't stop we'll stop them, because the Constitution doesn't say we must stop people who are protesting, even those who are now in the streets saying that, what they like, but nobody has a right to burn the grass in the name of protest." ([www.dailymaverick.co.za](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za), [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com)).

In the case of Eldorado Park, Mbalula argued that criminality was evident in protest action:

"Our approach is going to shift, because we must get the criminals and those who promote lawlessness. Genuine protest of our people gets infiltrated by criminals who use the opportunity to conduct themselves in criminal activity... We will continue to emphasise that state property must not be damaged and big and most importantly small business enterprises must not be looted" ([www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com), [westside-eldos.co.za](http://westside-eldos.co.za)).

Of further concern to human rights activists, Mbalula has had to censure his Deputy, Bongani Mkongi, for xenophobic sentiment in an on-air interview, perpetuating Mkongi's inflammatory remarks about residents of a building that

displayed an anti-Zuma billboard ([www.timeslive.co.za](http://www.timeslive.co.za)). Mbalula himself was a Deputy Police Minister (appointed in 2010) and was criticised for a lack of sensitivity towards human rights in this role, before his appointment as Minister of Sport and Recreation in 2014 ([whoswho.co.za](http://whoswho.co.za)).

Mbalula's comments receive considerable attention, both as a result of status as an ANC NEC member (to which he was elected in 2009), but also as "Minister of Twitter" who has a very active social media presence ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)). For those in local government and for protesters, the question is whether Mbalula's hardline on protests (at the least on containing them within the confines of the law) will have any impact on the policing of protests.

While there is clearly a risk of a hardened attitude towards protesters as well as destructive behaviour, given the absence of any clear policy on policing protests (other than acknowledging the right to protest while decrying destruction), it is unclear whether Mbalula will shift attitudes. Given his social media presence, media exposure and the rising violence associated with protests this year, however, Mbalula may just come to symbolise a hardened resolve against illegal protests.

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