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PRESS RELEASE

Commuters using railways across the country should take responsibility in exposing any crime that causes delays such as cable theft and burning of coaches and have empathy with defenceless train drivers who have to endure the trauma of not knowing who will be attacked next.

This is the reaction of Mr. Steve Harris, General Secretary of the United National Transport Union (UNTU), after furious commuters were left stranded and delayed for hours after train drivers in the Western Cape decided to tools down in protest after Pieter Barend (Piet) Botha (46) of Malmesbury were killed in broad daylight. Botha was shot twice in die head on Monday while waiting for a train at the Netreg Station. He was busy doing a refresher training course when four armed robbers overpowered him to rob his bag.

Botha was a loyal member of UNTU while he worked for Metrorail, a division of Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), for the past 26 years.

“Train drivers are very traumatized by this. Their lives are threatened daily due to circumstances beyond their control such as equipment failure due to power failures, signal failures due to lack of maintenance and cable theft. The public at large do not understand the trauma train drivers have to endure and have endured to date.”

“Every employee has the right to a safe working environment as entrenched in the law. As much as it is the Drivers responsibility to ensure that commuters are transported safely from and to work it is also the commuter’s responsibility to expose any crime,” says Mr. Harris.

UNTU thanked the South African Police Services (SAPS) for their prompt response in bringing these barbaric murderers to justice. The SAPS on Thursday arrested two suspects aged 22 and 37 in connection with the murder and for the illegal possession of firearms. It is alleged that one of the suspect was arrested after a tip off to the SAPS by a relative who heard about Botha’s death.

Botha’s family, wife Tania (42), daughter Nadia (16) and son Brendon (19) are heartbroken. His funeral arrangements are not yet finalized.

Non-profit Organisation – Ref: Number 036 913

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Mr. Harris says UNTU is still waiting for a response from PRASA after the Union demanded on Monday that an investigation should be done to determine why there were no security guards on the platform when Botha was attacked.

“UNTU have on numerous occasions engaged with PRASA to address the lack of security and safety. The UNION is of view that PRASA is not fulfilling its constitutional obligation to provide a safe and secure working environment for its employees,” says Mr. Harris.

On Christmas Day 25 December 2012 JP du Plessis (58), a Metrorail train driver, was found stabbed to death in a train near Hercules in Pretoria. Du Plessis also was a loyal member of UNTU.

Lucky Montana, the former CEO of PRASA, then announced that R100 million would be made available to strengthen the security on trains. This would have included armed guards at hotspots, visible policing and CCTV-footage. According to Harris PRASA has not kept its promises.

“UNTU sincere apologies for any inconvenience that was caused to commuters. Commuters must bear in mind that the recent burning of coaches has created a further problem and that is that there are fewer coaches that are available to render the required service.”

“The Union also appeal to commuters to vent their frustration to Government whom is solely responsible for the sufficient funding of the service,” says Mr. Harris.

For enquiries please phone Mr. Harris on 082 566 5516.

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