

Ari Danikas (Greece/South Africa)

2016 SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD



Ari Danikas was police reserve officer in the Cato Manor unit of the South African police. This unit typically deals with violent crime, including armed robbery, cash in transit robberies, the protection of politicians, kidnapping, drug trafficking, murder investigations and organised criminal gangs. They are an elite unit of the South African Police. Through the publication of a series of videos and public revelations, Danikas revealed that the unit was allegedly engaged in extrajudicial killing, tampering with crime scenes, and the torture of subjects.

In 2012, working with South Africa's *Sunday Times* journalists Stephan Hofstatter and Mzikazi wa Afrika (and with support from a third journalist, Rob Rose), Danikas had his disclosures published. This followed the initial posting of a series of videos forming part of the disclosure to YouTube in 2009. Following the initial *Sunday Times* pieces, the trio published a series of stories and produced a documentary with *Al Jazeera* focusing on the allegations.

Collectively, Danikas' disclosure and the subsequent series of articles reveal serious allegations against the Cato Manor squad. Over a period of many years, the members of the Cato Manor police squad — based in Durban, South Africa — have allegedly been involved in a number of illegal and unethical practices. These have allegedly included extra-judicial killing, torture, and the 'setting up' of crimes where a tip-off was given to the squad in advance of a crime and then the squad ambushed the suspects with over-zealous use of force.

Additionally, the squad was allegedly involved in the tampering of crime scenes by planting weapons, re-arranging corpses, cleaning gunpowder residue and other forensic manipulation. Danikas also documented at least one occasion where a suspect was reportedly tortured in police custody. A particularly graphic disclosure was a video in which it appears officers shot a suspect and let him bleed to death in a garage.

Blueprint does not imply the guilt of any party at this time. The allegations brought against the squad should be dealt with in a transparent manner. Danikas' evidence will be critical in an investigation of members of the squad. The allegations of continued violence, sustained over time, against low-income black South Africans is serious enough to need an impartial judicial review led by a panel of eminent jurists, such as retired judges from an international court, who are completely independent of the complex party politics of South Africa.

Before the initial publication of the videos as part of his disclosure in 2009, Danikas fled to his native country, Greece, in fear of his life. He is still subjected to threats and intimidation as a result of his disclosure.

Danikas' disclosure raises numerous public interest matters that deserve proper independent investigation; extra-judicial killing by an arm of the state offends the basic rights of any citizen. It is important for the citizenry to be able to have confidence in the rule of law, and those who enforce it.

This case is an excellent demonstration of a whistleblower and journalists working together to get information from secretive places into the public domain. It also highlights how journalists should be handling sensitive whistleblower sources, by protecting their anonymity, and not abandoning them as soon as the story is published.

Danikas has demonstrated bravery in stepping forward in a dangerous environment to speak out, and should be recognised for his sacrifice.

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