

CASSIM COOVADIA

Secretary General, Civic Associations of Johannesburg

Cas Coovadia was born in Johannesburg on 31 May 1951, the second youngest of the five children of Amina (born Bawa) and Abdul Huk Coovadia, a bookkeeper.

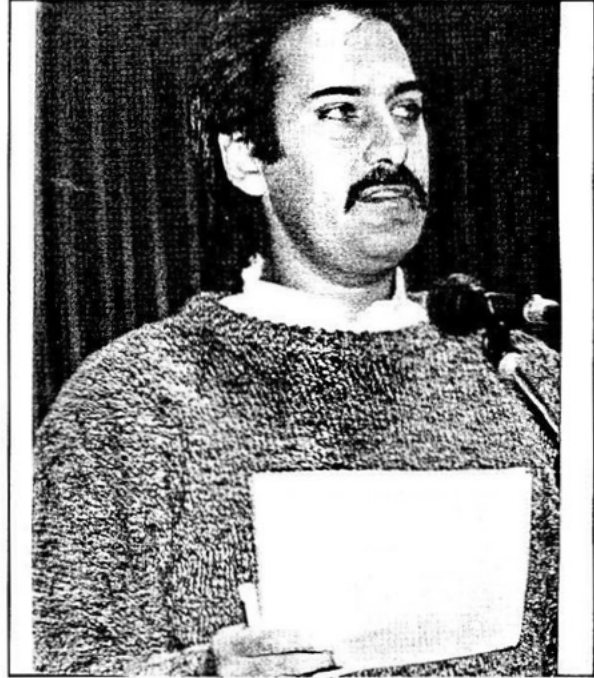
Coovadia grew up in Johannesburg's Ferreira's Town and Fordsburg suburbs and he matriculated from the Roodepoort Indian High School. From 1969-71 he studied at the University College of Durban (the forerunner to the University of Durban-Westville) and graduated with a BCom with Economics, Accounting and Commercial Law as majors. He later completed a Certificate in the Theory of Accounting through the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Coovadia served articles from 1972-75 in Johannesburg and in 1976 set up a private accounting practice partnership in the Pretoria Indian Group Area of Laudium. Following a period of political harassment, he was invited to join a private accounting practice in Cape Town, but after a year returned to Johannesburg where he worked with a firm of auditors until 1986. Since then he has worked full-time in political and community based organisations.

Coovadia was initiated into protest politics against the apartheid government whilst a student. Although he did not belong to any political organisation, he became involved in the Anti-Republic Day festival protests of 1971. His participation in a placard demonstration, in what the university described as an "illegal" meeting, resulted in overnight detention.

It was in Laudium in the eighties that Coovadia launched himself into active politics. Early in 1980 he became chairperson of a parent support group established for students detained in the continuing school boycotts. The activities of the support group prompted a security police crackdown which in August 1980 led to a three month period of detention of seven Laudium activists, including Coovadia. Following his release he made contact with Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) activists from Lenasia (near Johannesburg) and proceeded to become involved in TIC politics.

Coovadia participated in the formation of a civic association through the White Blocks Residents' Association, a sub-economic housing section of Laudium. In late 1981 he was detained again and held for three days subjected to almost continuous interrogation. It was clear that the Pre-



torial Security Police were intent on preventing any protest political activity developing in the otherwise quiet Laudium. The launch of civic structures throughout the country had resulted in hotbeds of protest politics. The clampdown was severe. Following a candlelight march of 300 people in protest against the detention of civic leaders, the White Blocks Civic collapsed.

The advent of the Tri-Cameral Parliament witnessed unprecedented protest campaigns. After a year-long stint in Cape Town, Coovadia returned to Johannesburg and involved himself in the Anti-South African Indian Council elections campaign which culminated in unprecedented protest campaigns against the so-called Koornhof Bills and the Tri-Cameral Parliament. The Anti-SAIC campaign had led to the revival of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and Coovadia joined the TIC offices as general administrator in 1984. In the process Coovadia became the TIC representative in the area committee of the United Democratic Front which had been launched in August 1983, and to which the TIC was affiliated.

In the security clampdown on activists following the temporary first State of Emergency declared in July 1985, Coovadia by 1986 found

himself once more detained for four months at Johannesburg's Diepkloof Prison. Following his release in September he continued his UDF activities which at that point had the popularising of the African National Congress (ANC) as one of its main goals. He had been elected to the Southern Transvaal regional executive committee of the UDF.

As the second State of Emergency, declared in June 1986, got underway, Coovadia went underground while joining in the preparations for the high profile publicity campaign which culminated in the placing of advertisements honouring the 75th anniversary of the ANC in national newspapers. His home was subsequently raided and another five month spell in detention at Diepkloof followed.

Upon his release he continued his UDF activities but had also started working for the Administrative Training Project (ATP), which provided administrative and financial training to organisations in the broad democratic movement.

Towards the end of 1988 he was seconded from ATP to the UDF national office to assist the treasury. It was at UDF headquarters that he got involved in the burgeoning civic movement and the formation of a national civic structure. By that time Actstop, which actively opposed Group Areas prosecutions, had been relaunched. Coovadia joined the organisation as publicity secretary.

Through his civic activities Coovadia became involved in the national Defiance Campaign launched by the Mass Democratic Movement in mid-1989. Coovadia was particularly active in the defiance actions directed at the hospitals and health institutions in October 1989.

During this period he also became instrumental in the launch of the Civic Association of Southern Transvaal (CAST) in August 1990. He joined the first executive of CAST as assistant general secretary. The unbanning of banned political

organisations in February 1990 had resulted in the folding of the UDF in August the same year.

With the formation of the Civic Associations of Johannesburg (CAJ) in October 1991 Coovadia was elected general secretary. CAJ is the central body for twelve civic associations from the Johannesburg area. Through CAJ Coovadia also participates in the Central Witwatersrand Metropolitan Chamber and serves as CAJ spokesperson in the Chamber. The Chamber was the first major local government negotiating forum established to create a new civic system.

Coovadia has also played a major role in the formation in March 1992 of the Central Johannesburg Partnership – a tripartisan collaboration between Actstop (which represents the community), the Johannesburg City Council and the private sector. The aim of the partnership is to stop central Johannesburg decay through inner city housing projects and to put a stop to capital flight from the central business district.

At present Coovadia is chief executive officer of the Community Banking Project which was set up in November 1991 by Coovadia, Khetso Gordon, Mark Swilling, Eric Molobi and Geoff Budlender, under the Chairmanship of Bob Tucker. A feasibility study of the project is due soon. The goal of the project is to create community controlled banking units to mobilise savings and provide loans appropriate to particular communities.

Coovadia was elected as secretary to the Johannesburg West branch of the African National Congress (ANC) earlier this year, but resigned a few months later, feeling that he could not be centrally involved in ANC and civic work at the same time. He remains a member of the branch.

Coovadia enjoys reading and listening to jazz and classical music.

He is married to Sabera Bobat and has a fourteen year old son from a previous marriage.