

LuM/038/0054/01

26th April, 1982

Dear Friends,

On the 18th May, 1982, one of the most outstanding leaders for the liberation of South Africa, Walter Max Ulyate Sisulu, who is imprisoned for life by the Apartheid regime, will be 70 years old.

The African National Congress, as a tribute to this veteran and tireless fighter for the overthrow of the racist regime of terror, appeals to all our friends and supporters to:

- send messages of support and birthday greetings to Walter Sisulu and his family at the following addresses:

Mr. Walter Sisulu  
Pollsmoor Prison  
Cape Town  
South Africa

Mrs. Albertina Sisulu  
7372 Orlando West  
P.O. Phirinia  
Johannesburg  
South Africa

- send letters of protest to the racist Prime Minister of South Africa against Sisulu's continued imprisonment and demand the release of all other political prisoners and detainees;
- organise events to mark his birthday and to highlight the struggle of the people of South Africa and especially the plight of political prisoners and detainees in South Africa.

Having regard to the stature of Walter Sisulu and the contribution he has made to the South African liberation struggle in particular and to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle in general as his attached biography will show, the African National Congress considers that his birthday offers all the peace loving and democratic forces an opportunity to pay a resounding tribute to a patriot and fighter, who has served his country and the cause of mankind with distinction and courage, not sparing any sacrifice in the pursuit of the just cause of freedom and liberation for his people, for democracy, social emancipation, for international friendship and peace.

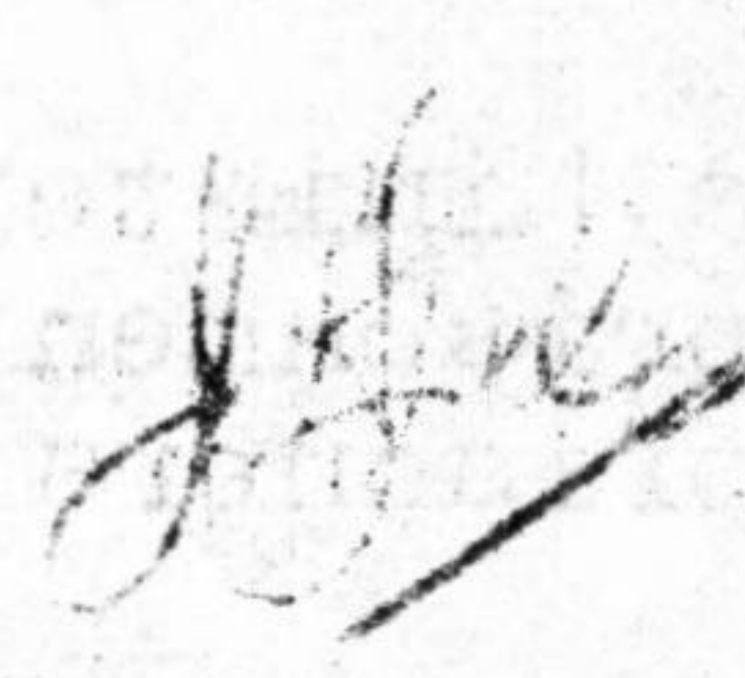
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The African National Congress therefore appeals to governments and international bodies, governmental and non-governmental organisations, parties and mass movements in all spheres of human endeavour to consider the conferment of awards and various honours on Walter Sisulu as a mark of respect for a life spent in the service of man and a demonstration of solidarity with the just struggle of the people of South Africa, led by the ANC, for a free, democratic and peaceful South Africa.

Attached please find biographical notes on Walter Sisulu.

We keenly await your responses to our circular and look forward to making the 70th birthday of Walter Sisulu a highpoint in our struggle for a world of freedom, justice, and peace.

  
J. Jele  
Director  
Department of International Relations



## Biographical Notes

Walter Max Ulyate Sisulu

Walter Sisulu was born at Engcobo in the Transkei district of the Cape Province on the 18th May, 1912, where he was brought up in a Christian home that respected and observed African traditions.

His peasant origins, under South African conditions, did not allow for advanced formal education and he left school after Standard Four to look for employment on the mines in Johannesburg in 1928.

His age, however, prevented his initial recruitment for underground work in the mines, whereupon he obtained somebody else's poll tax receipts and was recruited.

Upon arrival at Rose Deep Mines the Chief Clerk, who knew his mother, refused him underground work and helped him obtain a job with a dairy farmer on the outskirts of Germiston, where he washed, packed and delivered milk bottles.

At 16 years he was earning £1 a <sup>week</sup> ~~day~~ for a 12-hour working day, 7 days a week.

Upon being sjamboked (whipping with a hippo-hide whip) he tries to leave the farm but is returned. He eventually leaves after 8 months and takes on work as a domestic servant for a mine official who soon fires him, whereupon he works as a mine compound sweeper at £2.5sh. a month.

In 1929 he returns to Qutubeni in the Cape Province and only comes back to Johannesburg in the early thirties to work at Rose Deep Mines. He is forced against his will to work underground under a 120-day contract at 2 shillings per shift.



Sometimes in 1931 he returns to Qutubeni where he joins a co-operative society - his first ever participation in a voluntary association.

The 30's were a period of world economic depression which hit the Black worker in South Africa with particular severity. Sisulu goes to East London in search of employment and takes up work as a domestic servant at the end of 1931.

It is in this period that he comes into contact with the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) led by Clement Kadalie and with Walter Rubusana, a founder member of the ANC.

In 1933, after a stay in Qutubeni during 1932, he returns to Johannesburg, where his mother Alice works as a washerwoman, and takes employment at Premier Biscuits (a bakery) for 18/6 per week, delivering his mother's washing during weekends.

Sisulu works at Premier Biscuits from 1933 - 36 and it is during this period that he is involved in his first strike.

In 1934 Sisulu joins the Orlando Vigilante Association (OVA) an organisation concerning itself with liquor raids, pass raids, influx control and other civic matters. This marks a turning point in his development as he now participates directly in an organisation concerned with the workings of an oppressive administrative system. The OVA, with Herbert Mdingi as the moving spirit, becomes a foundation member of the Transvaal Vigilante Association and Sisulu and Mdingi become delegates of the Orlando Association to the Transvaal Association.

His first arrest was for vigilante work where he was accused of interference with police officers in the execution of their duties.

From Premier Biscuits Sisulu goes to the newspaper the "Bantu World", first as a newspaper seller and later as a distribution agent for "Bantu World" "Ilanga na se Natal", "Imvo za bantsundu" and the "Bantu Mirror" of the then Rhodesia. It is in this period that he starts writing for the "Bantu World".



Having been brought up in a culturally conscious family his interest in culture leads him to the Orlando Brotherly Society - a cultural organisation of which he soon becomes a leading member.

His work in this society brings him to the Chairmanship of the Orlando Musical Association, the Orlando Rugby Club and various activities through membership of the Bantu Men's Social Center (BMSC).

It is in these circles, at the end of the 30's, that he comes into contact with J.B. Marks - a leading trade unionists and member of the Communist Party of South Africa, who was himself a keen sportsman and able footballer. Sisulu during this time drifts through several jobs.

Through his cousin Samuel Mase he comes across leftist literature and widens his awareness of the world. This was the period of the rise of Japan to a world power and the looming threat of world war. It was on the issue of the Second World War that Sisulu split with Mdingi, who had become a close personal friend, Sisulu's position being that the Black man should not participate in the war as it was then a war between rival colonial powers (Mdingi had by then joined the civil guard formed by the city councils as opposed to Sisulu's membership of the Vigilante Associations formed by the people themselves).

Around this period - at the closing of the 30's - he meets Dr. Dadoo, who was then a leader of the Non-European United Front - an organisation leading the anti-war campaign, and it was this fact that led to Sisulu seeking Dadoo's acquaintance and services as a medical doctor.

The year 1940 is an important milestone in his life. He is recruited into the ANC by Alfred Mbele, a leading trade unionist. In the same year he becomes treasurer of the ANC Orlando Branch - assuming his first ever office in the movement in a branch that was active and influential beyond its size.



In 1942 he is delegated by Orlando to the National Conference where L.E.S. Gama, prompted by a students' strike at Fort Hare, raises the question of youth organisation. It is at this conference that a decision is taken to give greater attention to a youth movement - a decision that culminated in the formation of the ANC Youth League in 1944. It was also at this conference that Sisulu met Moses Kotane, another leading member of the ANC and the Communist Party who had traversed a similar path as Sisulu.

Meanwhile, in 1941, Sisulu had helped receive Mandela into Johannesburg and assisted with articles for Mandela. In that year too he meets Albertina who eventually becomes his wife on 15th July, 1944 with Mandela as his bestman. It was at this function at the BMSC that Anton Lembede, who was then President of the Youth League told Albertina: "You are marrying a man who is already married to the nation".

After the 1942 conference, where the youth question was raised, William Nkomo, Majonbozi and Sisulu take the initiative to meet various youth groups, including the Sophiatown Youth who became active in setting up a provisional youth committee at the beginning of 1944.

Mbatha and Sisulu convened a meeting and Nkomo was elected Chairman of the Provisional Committee. Sisulu, Nkomo, Ngubane and Mda as members of the Provisional Committee then met the President General of the ANC, Dr. Xuma, to discuss the formation of the Youth League. Through these discussions the NEC of the ANC eventually gave the go-ahead for the formation of the Youth League, whose inaugural conference took place in April 1944 at the BMSC and was opened by Rev. Selope-Thema who was then Speaker of the House in the ANC. The office bearers elected were:

President : Anton Lembede

Vice-President : V. Mbobo

Secretary : O.R. Tambo

Treasurer : W. Sisulu.



Sisulu's next major contribution to the development of the ANC was at the 1943 conference which modernised the ANC constitution. The ANC was turned from a federal into a unitary body. The House of Chiefs was abolished. The ANC introduced voluntary and individual membership and branches became the basic unit of the ANC. These decisions broadened the perspective of the ANC and made it a true mouthpiece of the Africans and Sisulu, who from his membership to his life sentence has missed only one conference, was together with his colleagues of the Youth League instrumental in this change.

In 1949, Sisulu is elected Secretary General of the ANC at the conference where the Programme of Action was adopted. Realising that for the movement to strike out in a forward thrust there had to be greater organisation, he discussed with his wife and colleagues his plans to give up all other work and devote his life to the movement. Albertina supports him fully and assumes the role of sole bread-winner and Sisulu becomes the first full-time functionary of the movement. The NEC decides to grant him £5 a month as travel expenses and Albertina (with two children in the family) agrees to pay for his monthly rail ticket.

In 1950 Sisulu introduces the rule of presenting the Secretary General's reports as reports of the NEC instead of the incumbent, thereby initiating the tradition of collective leadership that is the hall-mark of the ANC today.

The first June 26 National Strike in 1950 takes place under his secretary generalship and marks a turning point in the radicalisation of the movement based on the 1949 Programme of Action.

In 1950 the ANC considers the need for re-convening the Pan-African conference and passes a resolution to this effect. Sisulu plays a leading role towards reconvening the Pan-African Conference by writing to Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya and the NCNC of



Nigeria. The English statesman Fenner Brockway writes to him stating that he had heard of the ANC's plans for a Pan-African Conference and that the management and the whole matter should be left to him and his organisation - the Movement for Colonial Freedom. Sisulu replies that in the past Pan-African Conferences had been held elsewhere and not in Africa and that in his view the next Pan-African Conference must be held in Africa.

In 1952, the annual conference was held against the backdrop of the Defiance Campaign with the Volunteer-in-Chief, Nelson Mandela being placed under banning and the police looking for Sisulu.

The Working Committee of the ANC decided that Sisulu must go underground to avoid being served with a banning order before the conference. Even in conditions of legality Sisulu had to work clandestinely to prepare for conferences at which he presented his report, having arrived in disguise. This conference also discussed the likelihood of the ANC being banned.

In 1953 Sisulu is invited by the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) to the Youth Festival in Rumania and travels as a guest of honour with Duma Nokwe who was leading the delegation, without passports. Sisulu takes advantage of the Festival to discuss with other African delegates the reconvening of the Pan-African conference and travels to Israel, Britain, Poland, Czechoslovakia and to China on the Trans-Siberia rail. The discussions on the Pan-African conference considered Ghana and Egypt as possibilities in arranging the conference.

The journey to China brings him into contact with the Indonesian national movement and on his return via London he visits Seretse Khama in his exile to discuss the raising of political activity in the then so-called Protectorates. Here he meets veterans of the African Liberation Movement such as Wallace Johnson of Sierra Leone who had worked closely with Kenyatta and Padmore for the 5th Pan-African Conference in Manchester.



Sisulu takes up contacts with Kenneth Kaunda of the then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), M. Koinange of Kenya and the then Secretary General of the Kenya African Unions. Sisulu proposes an Africa-wide movement for the release of Kenyatta and writes to Nkrumah from London, sending him a draft of the suggested resolutions on the Pan-African Conference. After meeting Peter Abrahams who had been the ANC representative on the Manchester Pan-African Conference, he returns to South Africa in December 1953 and goes to the Queenstown Conference of the ANC. Eventually, the Pan-African Conference was held in Accra in 1958 with A. Hutchinson and E. Mphahlele as ANC delegates.

He is banned in 1954 and arrested a week after for breaking the ban by attending a meeting of the NEC. He however continues working clandestinely for the movement. He was ~~detained~~ <sup>detained</sup> under the State of Emergency ~~and charged with treason together with wide sections of the ANC leadership.~~ <sup>whilst on trial for high treason</sup>

During preparations for the 1961 All-in conference at Maritzburg, Sisulu addressed house meetings, during wide travels to circumvent his banning order.

Sisulu became Political Commissar in the first High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe, after participating in all discussions leading to its formation and took part in operations on the night of December 16th. He helped set up regional commands in Port Elizabeth and Natal during a period in which he was constantly under harassment by the police. He was arrested in 1962, charged with furthering the aims of the ANC and sentenced to six years imprisonment. During the prolonged period of appeals he participated in preparations for the ANC's Lobatsi Conference, which he addressed and returned to South Africa. Shortly afterwards, he was placed under house arrest.

Being on R6000 bail, he was instructed by the movement to go totally underground in April 1963 and was eventually arrested at Rivonia and sentenced to life imprisonment.

As a result of his earlier six year sentence his official record reads: Life sentence plus six years !

He has served 19 years imprisonment on Robben Island and is now held at Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town.