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Sisulu's heroic struggles will be manfully remembered, even in the US. HERE is no doubt that when the story of how South Africa defeated apartheid is told, Walter Sisulu will be one of the heroes who will be warmly remembered.

His memory will also live on in the . . . US, despite the image currently portrayed by its politics.

Before the news of his passing had hit newspapers there, an impromptu "phone tree" developed among those who had known him, especially US supporters of the struggle against apartheid.

This old-fashioned relay calling system, created during the campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, was used by activists to communicate and co-ordinate strategies.

The telephone calls came from as far as California, Florida and Atlanta from people who wanted to confirm the sad news and share their recollections of the Sisulu legend.

Sisulu began building links with US activists in the 1930s and 1940s.

He built solidarity by supporting the struggles of US organisations and individuals fighting racism and discrimination in their own country.

A major breakthrough in forging ties between the US and South Africa came in 1952 when Sisulu recommended that US activists form their own grassroots organisation to support the Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws, which the ANC had launched the same year in South Africa.

As a result of Sisulu's call, the American Committee on Africa, and later its sister organisation, the African Fund, were founded. The two organisations became anchors of the anti-apartheid struggle.

For many years, they were led by George Houser, a former Methodist preacher. 4

Acting in the Sisulu tradition, Houser was successful in uniting people from all walks of life - lawyers and labour leaders, religious leaders, legislators, students and academics - in a coalition which gained strength.

DUMLSANI. KUMALO

says Walter Sisulu galvanised

American activists

Shortly after Sisulu was released from Robben Island, he visited the US as a guest of the American Committee and the African Fund. His wife, Albertina, a hero in her own right, accompanied him.

When he talked to US audiences about the struggles of activists and scholars such as Paul Robeson and Dr William Dubois, it sent a message that

South Africans were ready to support
 those who had supported them.
 He ended each speech with the
 He built solidarity by
 supporting the
 struggles Of US
 organisations
 fighting racism in
 their own country
 humble plea: "Ningadinwa nangomso
 (Please do not tire of supporting us,
 even tomorrow)? '
 in Washington, Slsulu met with
 members of Congress, many of whom
 were meeting a political prisoner and
 freedom fighter for the first time in
 their lives.
 Those meetings helped many US
 leaders form a political impression of
 the ANC. which had recently been un-
 banned in South Africa.
 At one such meeting, Slsulu spent
 nearly an hour debating with former
 Democratic Party senator George
 Mitchell, then majority. leader of the
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 US Senate, on the justification of the
 armed struggle.
 At another encounter, hemet with
 former US senator David Boren, then
 chairman of the Senate Foreign Re-
 lations Committee, to explain the
 ANC's vision for a future non-racial
 0 state.
 Between 1995 and 1997, Slsulu sat
 for interviews with Houser which last-
 ed more than 28 hours. discussing his
 political experiences and his contri-
 butions to ending apartheid.
 These interviews enriched the rec-
 ollections of the supporters of the an-
 ti-apartheid struggle, who maintained
 their unconditional support for the
 ANC - even when various US admin-
 istrations acted differently.
 The interviews helped satisfy the
 curiosity of many US supporters who
 had always wanted to know about
 Sisulu's relationship with former
 President Nelson Mandela, his corn-
 rade for more than 62 years.
 in his own inimitable style Slsulu
 told Houser: "i came across Nelson
 when he came to my office in 1941. i
 said right from the beginning l was
 inspired. And i had plans for him.
 Here was a man i was looking for.
 tBecause i had taken so much inter- '
 est, he stayed with me for some time.
 Later, without my knowledge, he was
 to fall in love with my cousin, Evelyn,
 who had been studying in Orlando
 and staying with me.
 tAli this brought the friendship
 closer. it later got to a position where-
 by we could hardly sleep without
 meeting each other - talking, dis-
 cussing various things . . . That's how
 my relationship developed with Nel-
 son."

Among the qualities that everyone
in the US remembers about Sisulu
were his humility and optimism.
When asked how he remained an op-
timist after years on Robben island,
he simply said: "i have a firm belief in
the future."

El Kumaio is South Africa's ambas-
sador to the UN C

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