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greatest achievemÃ©ntsâ\200\231

EDWARD MOLOINYANE
Weekend Argus Reporter 7497 7

CORETTA Scott King, wife of
the late Martin Luther King
Jun and one of the hundreds of
foreign dignitaries expected for

the inauguration of president-

elect Nelson Mandela, was
looking forward to the occasion
as the celebration was â\200\234one of
the greatest achievements in
the history of humankindâ\200\235.

Accompanied by several
aides, Mrs King spoke at the
University of the Western
Cape, where she was a guest of
rector Jakes Gerwel and new
Provincial Affairs Minister Ka-
dar Asmal before jetting out to
Johannesburg.

She arrived in Cape Town on
Wednesday for the now-post-
poned swearing-in ceremony of
the new state president.

The informal gathering was
also attended by a number of
the universityâ\200\231s academics and
several students.

Emphasising the non-violent
approach which becdme synon-

mous with her husband, Mrs

King said her Iirst port of call
had been Durban, which was
the â\200\234African birthplace of non-
VIOIEnCe â\204ç [i e

Coretta Scott King
â\200\234Natal is a sacred and hal-

lowed place in the history of non-violent social change. For it was there that I}anaï¬\2011 gave birth to his non-violent campaign and that (Alan) Paton cried for his beloved country. It is from there that the spirit of non-violence rises from the grave at Groutville, the resting place of Chief Albert Euthuril, she said. "In a statement Mrs King said

it was remarkable that Natal was the place where

suthu Buthlezi, the greatest leaders in Africa, Nelson Mandela and others had cast their votes for the first time as citizens of the new South Africa.

I have come to witness the formal ending of the old apartheid South Africa and the beginning of the new nonracial South Africa. I have returned to Africa to celebrate one of the greatest achievements in the history of mankind, she said. :

It was so exciting, she said, to see South Africa moving towards multicultural democracy in a non-violent manner. What you have achieved here is miraculous.

In his short speech, UWC rector Jakes Gerwel said Martin Luther King Jr was a great inspiration and a shining example for us in this country.

Mrs King arrived in South Africa ahead of the other members of US president Bill Clinton's party because of a need to visit and attend ceremonies at the King-Luthuli Transformation Centre in Johannesburg. -

The centre, established in 1989, is supported by the Atlanta, Georgia-based King Centre.

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Forgive &

â\200\230The horror of openly racist h

B With Robben Islandâ\200\231s most famous ex-prisoner,
Nelson Mandela, being inaugurated as president on
Tuesday, a former fellow-prisoner looks back in

â\200\234anger.

JOHN YELD
Weekend Argus Reporter

FORGIVE but never forget
â\200\224 and particularly never
forget the physical and men-
tal abuse inflicted by apart-
heidâ\200\231s jailers at places like
Robben Island prison.

Thatâ\200\231s the attitude of many vet-
erans of South Africaâ\200\231s liberation
struggle, including academic, au-
thor and politician Neville Alex-
ander, whose Robben Island Dos-
sier 1964-1974: Report to the
International Commaunity is be-
ing published this week by UCT
Press.

Dr Alexander, who headed the
Workersâ\200\231 List Partyâ\200\231s election list
in the Western Cape and was sec-
ond on its national list of 30 candi-
dates, was jailed in 1964 with four
women and three men for alleged
conspiracy to commit sabotage
through the activities of the Yu
Chi-Chan Club and the National
Liberation Front.

For most of his 10 years in jail
he was held in Robben Island pris-
onâ\200\231s infamous â\200\234isolation sectionâ\200\235
where his fellow-inmates included
Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu,
Dennis Brutus and Toivo ja Toivo,

among many other prominent political leaders.

The dossier was originally written as a report to international organisations to highlight the harsh and inhumane conditions on Robben Island at the time of his incarceration, with life in the prison being described as 'the horror of an openly racist hell'.

In his foreword, Dr Alexander writes: 'It was an unspoken injunction understood by all prisoners who were released from the island that one of the most important contributions they could make to the wellbeing of those they left behind was to let in the light of public scrutiny on the goings-on in that prison.'

'We knew that the vile deeds of the prison authorities could not withstand the light of day ...

'For various reasons, I chose to write a report based on informa-

tion: dates, events, names of people, etcetera which

collected during my 10-year period of incarceration and which I

managed to conceal in various ways.'

Dr Alexander said he had completed the dossier within four months of his release in 1974, 'both because I wanted to use the period when things were still fresh in my memory and because of the timetables and agendas of certain international organisations, including the United Nations Special Committee (on apartheid) and General Assembly, as well as the International Commission of Jurists.'

'Because of the ever-present threat of prosecution under the draconian Prisons Act (1959), both my authorship and my role in proliferating the information contained in the dossier had to be

- concealed ...

'It was a very serious matter since I was not only flouting the Prisons Act but also my house arrest order in terms of which I was prohibited from publishing anything. Publishing included explicitly the kind of text I was sending

into the world.â\200\235

In a foreword veteran politician Helen Suzman â\200\224 whose first visit to Robben Island in 1967 was credited by Dr Alexander as the turning point in the treatment of political prisoners â\200\224 writes that the dossier should be compulsory reading for a public â\200\234only too ready to forget South Africaâ\200\231s oppressive past. _

â\200\234It is a stark reminder of the grim days of retribution during apartheidâ\200\231s darkest hour under the relentless hostility of Verwoerd and Vorster towards the so-called enemies of the state.

â\200\234Their attitude was reflected in the treatment endured in prison by such people. Robben Island, in the early days, was perhaps the worst example of that official attitude â\200\224 that is, that deprivation of liberty was insufficient punishment, even if it is for life.

â\200\234Further punishment should therefore be meted out within the prison system itself . . .

â\200\234If there is one important fact that emerges from the prison journal of Neville Alexander, it is the dire need for a watchful eye to be kept on the manner in which the most helpless of all human be-

ings â\200\224 those behind bars in prison

â\200\224 are treated.â\200\235

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O EX-PRISONER: Neville Alexander when he was younger.

C1BEATEN: The Dossier describes how Namibian Toivo ja Toivo was assaulted during a hunger strike in Robben Island prison, for being a â\200\230ringleader and agita-

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torâ\200\231.

[DOSSIER: A photograph of the prison on Robben Island carried on the cover of Neville Alexander's book, published this week.

How a hunger strike
turned to violence

THE Robben Island Dossier gives several accounts of physical violence.

On 28 May 1971, a certain head warder ... (whose sinister personality is so disturbing that he is described in detail in Addendum Three to this document), who at the time was in charge of the single-cells section of the prison, arbitrarily deprived two young political prisoners from Namibia of their meals for the day. :

On the previous day he had done the same thing
- to two other Namibians ...

As a result of his provocative action all the prisoners in the section went on hunger strike, demanding that their two colleagues should be properly charged.

In retaliation, a gang of warders, led by Chief Warder . . . , raided the single cells that night from lam until approximately 4am.

Each prisoner was forced to stand in his own cell, stark naked and with hands up against the wall, while the warders ransacked his cell for alleged unauthorised items.

Needless to say, not a single such article was unearthed. But 28 prisoners were assaulted, some of them severely.
~ Most of these were Namibians, including Toivo ja Toivo, who was alleged to have been the ring-leader and an agitator.

Japhtha Masemola was beaten unconscious, while Abel Chiloane was so severely injured that for days he urinated blood.

Attempts to get the assaults reported to lawyers were stymied, and the doctors were simply not available for three whole weeks, by which time visible injuries had healed up.

Psychologically, this was a turning point for Robben Island prison.

The authorities came to realise that the prisoners had been so angered that if at any stage this type of thing were to be repeated, there would be a shooting and a killing ... "

Prisoners

laboured

between
a rock and
a hard placeâ\200\231

THE dossier contains graphic accounts of hardships in Robben Island prison during the 1960s, including exhausting hard labour, meagre and often unappealing food, the lack of proper clothing and bedding and the brutality of certain warders.

â\200\234All political prisoners are sentenced to â\200\230hard labourâ\200\231, a very vague term which is interpreted most whimsically, depending on policy, temperament and atmosphere at the various levels of prison bureaucracy ...

â\200\234For years, the â\200\230knap-lineâ\200\231 (knap-ping was prison-talk for crushing stone) was one of the main points of friction and confrontation between the political prisoners and the authorities. Anyone who has seen what is involved will realise that this form of retributive punishment can drive the most phlegmatic man into a state of fury.

â\200\234Prisoners have to sit from 7.30 or so in the morning until 4pm with only one hourâ\200\231s break for lunch, crushing large stones with a five-pound hammer down to a fine gravel to be used on roads and in concrete mixers, inter alia.

â\200\234To the novice, of course, it is a traumatic, nightmarish experience, especially when he is faced with the threat of punishment for not crushing the prescribed quota (and the authorities continue to enforce piece-work even though their own courts have ruled that such enforcement is illegal). .. 1

â\200\234The work is maddening enough: The very knowledge that there are pneumatic machines which can produce in a few hours what a span of prisoners produce in a year is enough to drive one to desperation. â\200\230

â\200\234To have to sit in the sun without moving and (for months at the beginning) without being allowed to speak to oneâ\200\231s neighbour was hell on earth. i

â\200\234But, some officers went further:,â\200\231 They would often punish the prisonersâ\200\230f by seating them in the most disadvantageous places in the quarry, especially those corners where the cold north-

wester or the fierce south-easterly|
winds could buffet them throughout the|
day ... \

â\200\234The whole should also be seen in the \
context of prisoners who are not given
enough to eat and (who) do not have ad-
equate clothing to put on. Often prison- |
ers have been forced to work in the |
rain without the protection of water- |
proof coverings. ;

â\200\234On the knap-line, where there is lit- |
tle movement of the body involved, this |
could be disastrous, especially at the |
time when prisoners had no change of |
clothing . ..â\200\235