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CURRICULUM VITAE

ALBERTINA SISULU

Born in Tsomo District in the Transkei on the 21.10.1918 married in 1944 to Walter Sisulu, and have five children.

Joined the ANC in 1946.

Elected Transvaal President of the Federation of South Africa in 1963.

Banned for 19 years of which 10 years was house arrest.

Elected Co-President of the U.D.F. in 1983.

Elected Deputy President of the ANC Women's League in 1991 now elected a member of ANC National Executive in 1991.

ALBERTINA SISULU
DEPUTY PRESIDENT
ANC WOMENS' LEAGUE

Albertina Sisulu is the matriarch of one of the most famous families in South Africa which have struggled against apartheid and struggled under it. Albertina Sisulu was born in the Tsomo district of the Transkei in 1919. Orphaned as a teenager she had to help care for her family and abandon her plans to become a teacher. She eventually moved to Johannesburg to train as a nurse.

Mrs. Sisulu's political involvement began in the early 1940's through the influence of her husband-to-be, Walter Sisulu, who was then active in the ANC Youth League. She was married to Walter in 1944 and became totally immersed in politics alongside her husband in what has been described as an unusual and unique marriage. Mrs. Sisulu demonstrated complete devotion to her husband, and they produced five children between 1944 and 1958, but she was active politically in her own right and was involved in the ANC Womens' League from 1948. She also was very involved in the Defiance Campaign of the early 1950's, the 1956 womens' protest against passes and the campaign against bantu education.

Mrs. Sisulu had to endure the numerous arrests, bannings and trials of her husband between 1953 and 1964 while trying to raise her family and support the struggle. The imprisonment of Walter Sisulu in 1963 after the Rivonia trial was the most difficult moment in Mrs. Sisulu's life. Mrs. Sisulu was detained for 90 days herself in 1963 and for the next twenty years was placed under banning orders including ten years of house arrest. Mrs. Sisulu was sentenced to four years of prison in 1984 for furthering the aims of the ANC but her conviction was set aside on appeal. In August 1983, while in custody, Mrs. Sisulu was elected President of the United Democratic Front in the Transvaal.

In 1985 Mrs. Sisulu and fifteen others were charged with high treason but the charges against her and eleven others were dropped for lack of evidence. In February 1988 the South African Government restricted the activities of seventeen organizations including the UDF and placed severe restriction orders on Mrs. Sisulu. Mrs. Sisulu was part of a UDF delegation which met USA

President George Bush in June 1989 and, following the unbanning of the ANC in February 1990, she became active in re-establishing the ANC Womens' League. She was elected Deputy President of the ANC Womens' League in May 1991 at the first National Conference of the League held in over thirty years.

Albertina Sisulu has endured countless hardships in the course of her life including long separations from her husband and children. Nonetheless, she has maintained her dignity and spirit and her sense of humour. Mrs. Sisulu celebrated with great joy her husband's release from prison in October 1989, and her own unbanning the day before. An even greater occasion for celebration was March 30, 1991 when there were no more Sisulus in jail.

ALBERTINA SISULU

Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu was born in 1917 in Transkei. She joined the African National Congress Women's League in 1941 while training to be a nurse in Johannesburg. Through the organization she met ANC activist Walter Sisulu and in 1944 they were married.

In October 1958 Mrs. Sisulu was among 1,000 women arrested for burning passbooks in an anti-passbook demonstration in Johannesburg. Despite the government's efforts to intimidate her, Sisulu was a founding member of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in 1954, and she was elected Transvaal president of the organization in 1963. She was also elected to the position of treasurer of the ANC Women's League in 1959.

In 1960 the ANC was banned and the movement was forced underground. On July 11, 1963, Walter Sisulu was arrested and sentenced in 1964 to life imprisonment for sabotage. 1964 also marked the beginning of Albertina Sisulu's banning orders which lasted for a period of 17 years.

In 1981 the banning order expired without immediate renewal. She began to speak tirelessly again at public meetings against the mistreatment and murder of political prisoners. In 1983 she was detained for seven months in solitary confinement and on the 24th February 1984 she was sentenced to four years imprisonment for furthering the aims and objectives of the ANC.

While she was in jail in 1984 Mrs. Sisulu was elected one of the three joint presidents of the United Democratic Front (UDF). In September 1985 she was tried in Pietermaritzburg as a member of the "UDF 16" accused of treason. The accused were acquitted and released in December 1985.

Mrs. Sisulu has been under banning orders for 18 years of her life, longer than anyone else in the country. The price for her activism has been high: it has meant having to raise five children without a husband and while under banning orders; being confined to her house from 6pm to 6am weekdays and all day on weekends.

Mrs. Sisulu, a nurse by profession, worked in the City Health Department in Soweto. She has continued in this roll throughout her life and in 1981 began working in a shanty clinic. Today Albertina Sisulu is a leader in the ANC Women's League.

NTSISKELELO ALBERTINA SISULU

President, Federation of South African Women, 1983.

President, United Democratic Front, 1983.

(waiting for 1991

update) 1991

ELECTED DEPUTY-
PRESIDENT

ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Albertina Sisulu was born in the Tsoomo district of the Transkei. She was orphaned as a teenager and, being the second eldest of a large family, became partly responsible for them. Giving up her plans to become a teacher, she left the Transkei to train as a nurse at the Johannesburg Non-European Hospital.

Her political involvement began in the early 1940s through the influence of her husband-to-be, Walter Sisulu, who was at the time an active member of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League. She attended meetings with him, including the inaugural meeting of the Youth League. They were married in the Transkei in July 1944.

Sisulu's married life was not smooth: between 1953 and 1964, her husband, then the general secretary of the ANC, was imprisoned eight times. He was involved in the marathon treason trial of Congress leaders and in 1964 was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia trial.

Sisulu joined the ANC Women's League in 1948 and became active in the Federation of South African Women to which the Women's League was affiliated. She was very involved in ANC activities, including the Defiance Campaign of the early 1950s, the 1956 women's protest against passes and the campaign against the introduction of bantu education. During the latter campaign, her Orlando West home served as a classroom when community schools were established as an alternative form of education. These classes continued until it became illegal to run unregistered schools.

Sisulu was detained under the 90-day detention clause for three months in 1963. From 1964 to 1983 she was under banning orders, including ten

years of house arrest. In August 1983 she was charged with furthering the aims of the ANC by attending a funeral in 1982 where she allegedly sang ANC songs, distributed pamphlets and draped an ANC flag over the coffin. In February 1984 she was found guilty and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. However, her conviction was set aside on appeal.

In August 1983, while in custody awaiting trial, she was elected unopposed as Transvaal president of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a front made up of groupings opposed to the new constitution and the Koomhof Bills. Because of her detention, she was unable to attend the UDF's national launch in Cape Town that month.

In 1985 Sisulu and 15 others, all members of the South African Allied Workers' Union, United Democratic Front, Natal Indian Congress, Transvaal Indian Congress or Release Mandela Committee, were charged with high treason. In April 1985 the accused were granted bail and their trial began in August 1985. On 9 December charges against 12 of the 16, including Sisulu, were dropped following the collapse of state evidence on revolutionary politics.

On 24 February 1988 the South African government restricted the activities of 17 organisations, including the UDF, and at the same time Albertina Sisulu received restriction orders preventing her from travelling outside a specified geographical area or participating in political activities.

Following the 1988 rent crisis in Soweto, Sisulu formed part of a delegation of prominent Soweto residents which met with Soweto's 'mayor' to discuss the rent boycott. After the meeting the delegation announced that the Soweto City Council had agreed to halt raids on homes and prosecutions for non-payment of rents.

In June 1989 Sisulu was part of a UDF delegation which met United States President George Bush. The delegation was invited to Washington as part of a process of broad consultations between the US administration and South African leaders.

Following the February 1990 unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela, Sisulu has served on a committee charged with re-establishing the ANC Women's League.

The Sisulus have five children, and live in Soweto.

SOURCES

1. Sean Moroney and Linda Ensor, *The Silenced*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1979.
2. *Sunday Tribune*, 14 February 1982.
3. *Muslim News*, 7 May 1982.