

# New SA 'one of man's greatest achievements'

EDWARD MOLOINYANE

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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 "one of the greatest achievements in the history of humankind".

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 Kadar Asmal before jetting out to Johannesburg.

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

The informal gathering was also attended by a number of the university's academics and several students.

Emphasising the non-violent approach which became synonymous with her husband, Mrs King said her first port of call had been Durban, which was the "African birthplace of non-violence".



Coretta Scott King

"Natal is a sacred and hallowed place in the history of non-violent social change. For it was there that Gandhi 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 Luthuli," she said.

In a statement Mrs King said it was remarkable that Natal was the place where "two of

the greatest leaders" in Africa, Nelson Mandela and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, 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 Jun 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.



# Forgive but never forget

'The horror of openly racist hell' — that was Robben Island, says new book

■ With Robben Island's most famous ex-prisoner, Nelson Mandela, being inaugurated as president on Tuesday, a former fellow-prisoner looks back in anger.

**JOHN YELD**  
Weekend Argus Reporter

**FORGIVE** but never forget — and particularly never forget the physical and mental abuse inflicted by apartheid's jailers at places like Robben Island prison.

That's the attitude of many veterans of South Africa's liberation struggle, including academic, author and politician Neville Alexander, whose *Robben Island Dossier 1964-1974: Report to the International Community* is being published this week by UCT Press.

Dr Alexander, who headed the Workers' List Party's election list in the Western Cape and was second on its national list of 30 candidates, 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 prison's infamous "isolation section" 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 information — dates, events, names of people, etcetera — which I had 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."

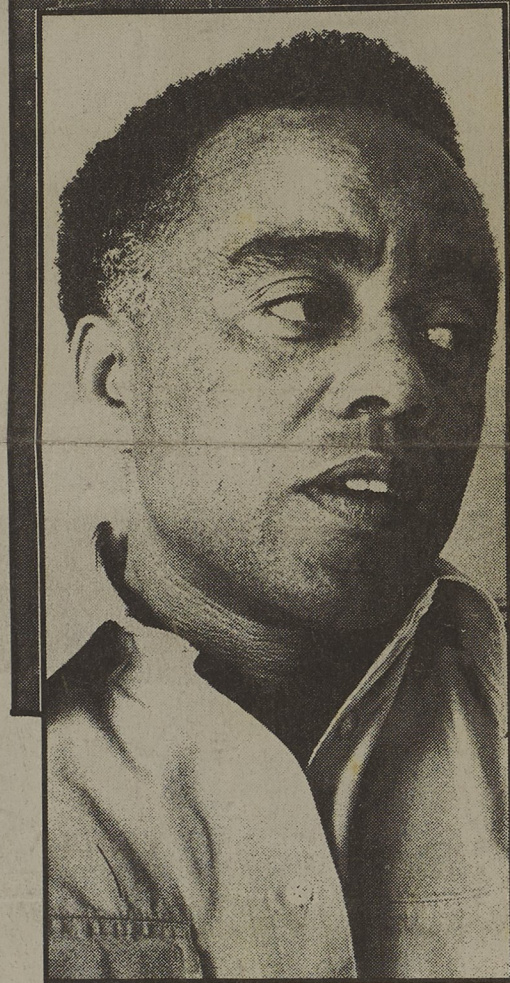
In a foreword veteran politician Helen Suzman — whose first visit to Robben Island in 1967 was credited by Dr Alexander as the turning point in the treatment of political prisoners — writes that the dossier should be compulsory reading for a public "only too ready to forget South Africa's oppressive past."

"It is a stark reminder of the grim days of retribution during apartheid's darkest hour under the relentless hostility of Verwoerd and Vorster towards the so-called enemies of the state."

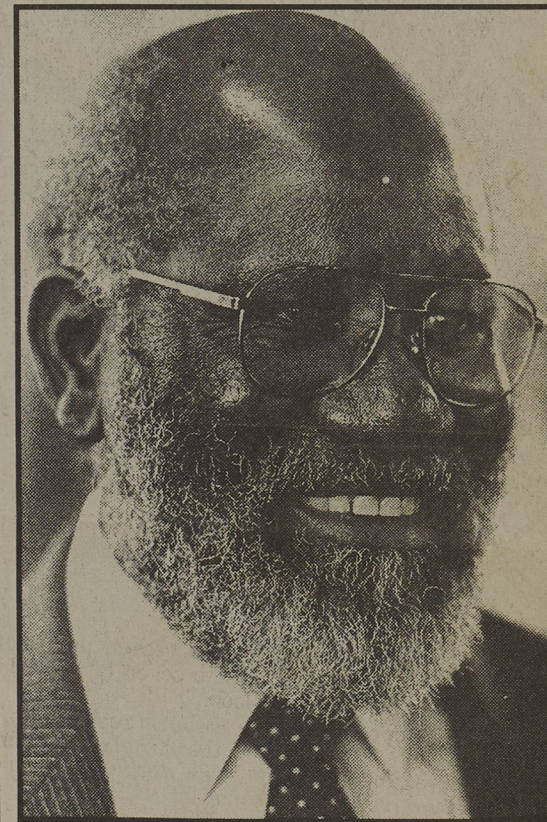
"Their attitude was reflected in the treatment endured in prison by such people. Robben Island, in the early days, was perhaps the worst example of that official attitude — that is, that deprivation of liberty was insufficient punishment, even if it is for life."

"Further punishment should therefore be meted out within the prison system itself ...

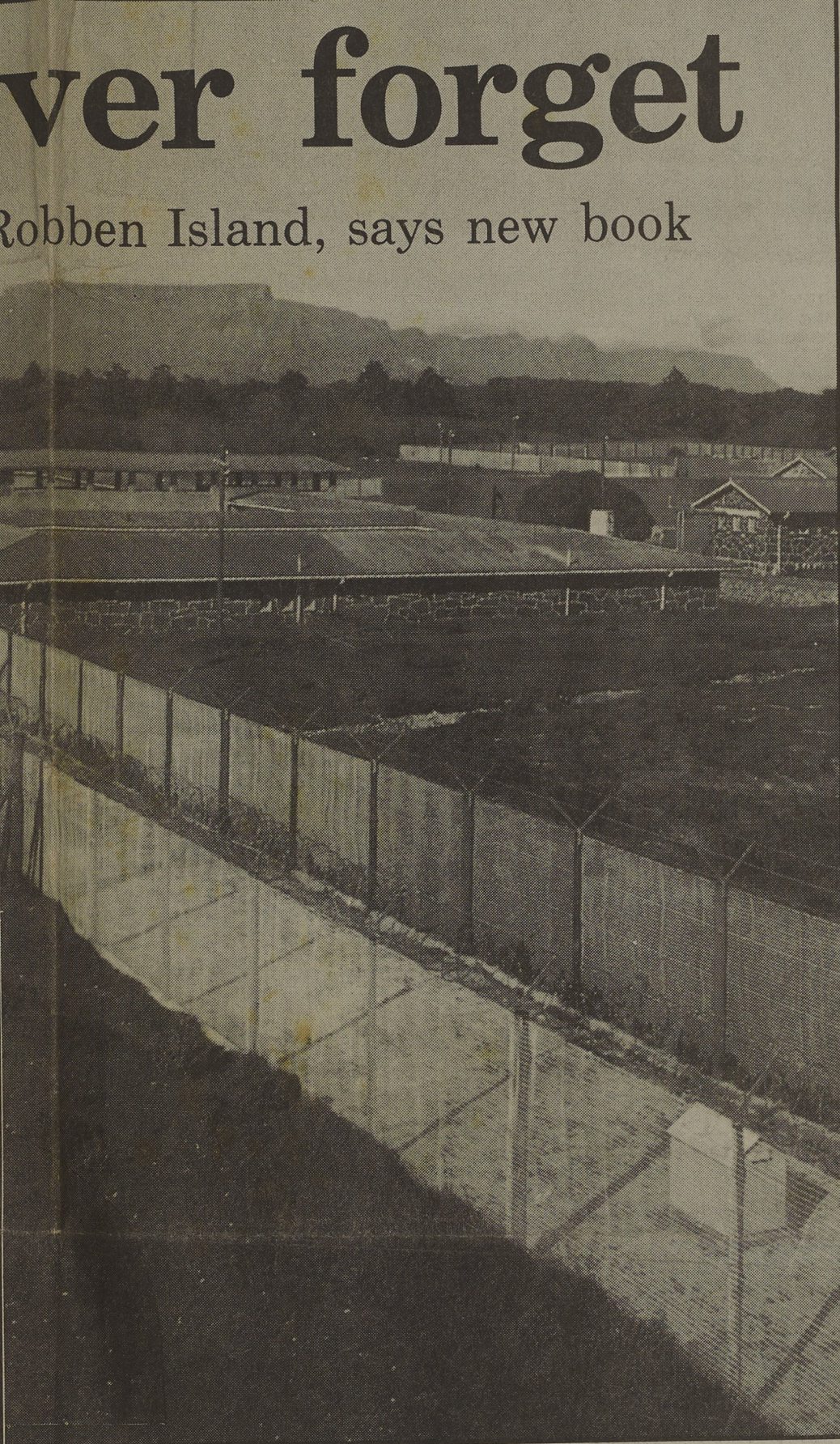
"If there is one important fact that emerges from the prison journal of Neville Alexander, it is the dire need for a watchful eye to be kept on the manner in which the most helpless of all human beings — those behind bars in prison — are treated."



□ **EX-PRISONER:** Neville Alexander when he was younger.



□ **BEATEN:** The *Dossier* describes how Namibian Toivo ja Toivo was assaulted during a hunger strike in Robben Island prison, for being a 'ringleader and agitator'.



□ **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 1am 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 ringleader 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 place

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

"All political prisoners are sentenced to 'hard labour', a very vague term which is interpreted most whimsically, depending on policy, temperament and atmosphere at the various levels of prison bureaucracy ...

"For years, the 'knap-line' (*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."

"Prisoners have to sit from 7.30 or so in the morning until 4pm with only one hour's 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*."

"To 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) ...

"The 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."

"To have to sit in the sun without moving and (for months at the beginning) without being allowed to speak to one's neighbour was hell on earth."

"But, some officers went further: They would often punish the prisoners 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 ...

"The whole should also be seen in the context of prisoners who are not given enough to eat and (who) do not have adequate clothing to put on. Often prisoners have been forced to work in the rain without the protection of waterproof coverings."

"On the knap-line, where there is little movement of the body involved, this could be disastrous, especially at the time when prisoners had no change of clothing ..."

