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Lum/98A/0029/37

NOTE re release

of Walter SISULU with other
prisoners too.

INITIALLY: TALK OF RELEASE

SEE: POLITICS - Home (some cases)
+
Political Prisoners

Then
ON RELEASE

SEE: Political Prisoners

FOR MAJOR STATEMENTS
AND FOR THE BIG RALLY
AND SINCE SEE: This
File

South Africa to free eight ANC activists

12-10-89

HUST

From PETER YOUNGHUSBAND and agencies in Cape Town

THE imminent release of eight anti-apartheid activists by the South African President, Mr De Klerk, has been welcomed by the jailed leader of the African National Congress, Mr Nelson Mandela.

Veteran ANC leaders, Mr Walter Sisulu and Mr Oscar Mpetha, will be among the eight to be unconditionally released, Mr De Klerk said yesterday.

Mr Mandela said he was "glad for their release" but did not expect to be freed himself.

A leading member of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) anti-apartheid alliance, Mr Murphy Morobe, said Mr Mandela had spoken at length about the releases.

Mr Mandela had told him many others serving long-term sentences should be released before he was freed.

Mr De Klerk said the prisoners would be released when the "necessary formalities" had been dealt with, which would "take some time".

Mr Mandela had been told of the releases. "Discussions were held and he confirmed yet again his release is not on the agenda now," Mr De Klerk said.

Five of those to be released, including Mr Sisulu, are close political associates of Mr Mandela, having spent more than 25 years in jail with him since the Rivonia trial of 1964.

The trial, the most dramatic court case in South Africa's history, found Mr Mandela and his associates guilty of treason, after proving their attempts to overthrow the government by violence.

The trial acquired its name from the Rivonia farm, a smallholding near Johannesburg, the secret headquarters of the ANC cell led by Mr Mandela.

The Rivonia trialists to be released are: Mr Sisulu, Mr Ahmed Kathrada, Mr Raymond Mhlaba, Mr Elias Matsoaledi and Mr Andrew Mlangeni.

The other three to be released are Mr Oscar Mpetha, Mr Jafta Masemola, and Mr Wilton Mkwayi.

Apart from Mr Mpetha, who is in hospital in Cape Town, and Mr Masemola, who is jailed in Diepkloof prison outside Johannesburg, all the prisoners are detained at Pollsmoor prison outside Cape Town.

The De Klerk announcement was preceded by a meeting on Tuesday between Mr Mandela and the new

Constitutional Planning Minister, Mr Gerrit Viljoen.

The United Democratic Front (UDF) and its trade union ally, COSATU, hailed the release as a "massive victory".

They said in a joint statement: "They are tried and tested leaders of our people."

"Their release is a victory for the international solidarity, the sanctions campaign and the campaign to isolate the regime."

"While Mandela says his release is not on the agenda, it has to be ensured by increased pressure from the masses."

Mr Mpetha, 80, who is ill and regarded as a spent force within the ANC, could be released today.

He is the honorary president of the Release Mandela Committee, former president of the anti-apartheid United Democratic Front (UDF), and was chairman of the Cape division of the ANC before it was banned in 1960.

He was jailed in the mid-1980s after being convicted of terrorism.

Mr Sisulu, 77, is Mr Mandela's right-hand man and an original ANC warrior. His release will test how South Africa's 26 million voteless blacks will react to the reappearance of a genuine leader after 27 years in jail.

Along with Mr Mandela and Mr Sisulu, Mr Kathrada, 60, Mr Mhlaba, 69, Mr Motsoaledi, 65, and Mr Mlangeni, 63, were sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964 after being convicted of planning acts of sabotage.

Mr Kathrada became a key figure in the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s as chairman of the Transvaal Indian Congress. He was arrested when police raided Lilliesleaf farm at Rivonia in July, 1963.

Mr Mhlaba, a communist, was Port Elizabeth chairman of the ANC between 1947-53.

Mr Motsoaledi was the most influential union leader in the ANC. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia Trial.

Mr Mlangeni was ANC regional secretary in Soweto from 1958-60. It was alleged he had stored dynamite and recruited youths for overseas military training.

Mr Mkwayi, 65, was arrested in 1964.

Mr Masemola was sentenced to life imprisonment in June 1963 for sabotage, along with five other members of the Pan African Congress. He is South Africa's longest-serving political prisoner.