

Ahmed Kathrada

(1929 - 2017)

A Life of Activism



AhmedKathrada
Foundation
Deepening Non-Racialism



Derek Hanekom

Ahmed Kathrada – A Moral Compass for All Time

Revolutionary. Lifelong activist against racism. Internationalist. These words were boldly displayed on a banner at Ahmed Kathrada's funeral in Johannesburg on 29 March 2017.

Comrade Kathy, as many of us know him, became an activist at the age of twelve. He dedicated his life to the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa. He sacrificed his youth by serving a life sentence in prison for fighting against a racist, apartheid state. He dedicated his time after his release from imprisonment to building a new South Africa. And as the years advanced, Comrade Kathy still continued serving – promoting non-racialism and human rights through the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation.

In death too, he still made his mark. His funeral was characterised by dignity and a sombre sense of loss, but it also provided a platform to reflect on why we should continue his legacy and uphold the values that Comrade Kathy stood for. Comrade

Kathy was known for his honesty and courage in speaking out against what he believed was wrong. At his funeral, a similar sort of honesty and frankness prevailed. Speakers reflected on the political challenges faced by South Africa, and what needs to be done to solve it. Despite his passing, Comrade Kathy was still playing the role of moral compass.

He has taken his place amongst the giants of our revolution. He remains a guiding light for all of us, so that when we are confronted with uncertainty and doubt, all we need to do is to look at the example he set, and follow the light that he brought into our world.

During apartheid, the Rivonia Trialists were the 'unseen' heroes whom we had looked up to. I say 'unseen', because many of us had never met these leaders who had been imprisoned before our time. Despite the apartheid government's resolve to lock them away from society, it was ordinary people who kept their stories and their voices alive. Through these stories, we came to know the revolutionaries who the apartheid state so feared.

Today, it is ordinary people who will once again keep the legacy of Comrade Kathy alive. I am glad that so many young activists today, especially those who are part of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation's Youth Leadership Programme, have had an opportunity to interact with him. From Comrade Kathy, they would have learnt what true leadership is. They would have understood that our basic values of pursuing the truth, justice, fairness, freedom, equality and dignity for all can never be compromised. They would also have realised why these values must continue to guide South Africa's future. This leaves me with a sense of hope.

I remain hopeful that the spirit of selfless dedication to the struggle that Comrade Kathy and his generation took up, all those years ago, will continue running through the veins of young people today, inspiring them to always do what is right, what is just, and what is fair. I remain hopeful that the young people of today will know what it means to put their country and their people first, above their own personal interests, and to work together to build a future for the generations to come. This is the foundation upon which the future of this country must be built, and we are eternally grateful to revolutionaries, activists and internationalists like Ahmed Kathrada for laying the cornerstones.

Derek Hanekom

Chairperson: Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

Early Life



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Kathy standing outside the Kathrada general dealer shop during a visit in the 1940s



Ahmed Mohamed 'Kathy' Kathrada was born on 21 August 1929 in the small rural town of Schweizer-Reneke, the fourth of six siblings. Schweizer-Reneke is located in what is today called the North West Province and is about three hundred kilometres from Johannesburg.

His parents were immigrants from the village of Lachpur, in India, and were married before settling in South Africa.

Kathy's father, Mohamed Kathrada, like many Indian immigrants, was a trader and ran a small general dealer shop. His mother, Hawa, was the nucleus of the family playing the role of wife, mother and businesswoman in the general dealership. The Kathrada family was not wealthy, but Kathy's parents ensured a comfortable standard of living.

Mohamed Kathrada was a leading member within the small Muslim community of Schweizer-Reneke. He was a learned man in Islam and acted as the imam (congregation leader) during prayer services which were held behind the family shop or at their home.

In rural outposts, like Schweizer-Reneke, relationships across racial lines were cordial, empathetic and generally peaceful. Underlying these social relationships was the understanding that political and economic bias was skewed towards white people at the expense of people of colour.

White residents of rural towns tended to be deeply conservative and Schweizer-Reneke was no different. In later years Schweizer-Reneke would confer the Freedom of the Town to Eugene Terre'Blanche, the former leader of the extreme right wing and fascist Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB).

The land upon which his father had opened his business could not be owned by him because, at that time, Indians were forbidden from owning land. His father had the land registered under a 'Cape Malay' friend's name and had to trust that the friend would not claim the property as his own.

Childhood

As a child Kathy was blissfully unaware of the racial divide that existed at that time. His playmates straddled across the racial divide. His 'granny', Mrs 'Ouma' Oosthuizen, was an Afrikaner midwife who delivered him; and his very first teacher was an African man, Mr David Mtshali.

As a young child Kathy was required to learn Arabic in order to read the Islamic holy book, the Quran. By the age of six Kathy demonstrated such proficiency and fluency in Arabic that there was a time when an uncle wanted to take him to India in order to train him into a muslim scholar. Fortunately for South Africa, Kathy's mum refused the offer.

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"My life as a young South African was smooth, marked by the joy of major celebration, and the warmth and friendship, the sense of community, the small-town life. To celebrate Eid, we would hold a picnic at the dam, and all the Indian people of Schweizer came, bringing food and soft drinks, sweets for the children, tablecloths and umbrellas and all the other paraphernalia that made picnics colourful and joyous affairs. It was lovely, and I use to race around with the other children, doing naughty things that children do, getting dirty and thoroughly enjoying myself." *Memoirs 2004:22*

At the age of eight his idyllic childhood in Schweizer-Reneke came to an abrupt end. The rural town had a school for whites and one for Africans but no school facilities for young school-going Indian children like Kathy.

In order to gain an education, like his three elder brothers, Kathy had to move to Johannesburg. This dislocation was a traumatic event for the eight-year-old.

"My fate was sealed. Bags were packed, tearful goodbyes were said, the car was loaded. I was ensconced in the back seat next to my father, the driver started the engine and we were off. Of all the farewells, this one was the most keenly felt, and the memory remained with me all my life – a little boy pretending not to cry and making all sorts of excuses for his moist cheeks." *Memoirs 2004:27*

Moving to Johannesburg

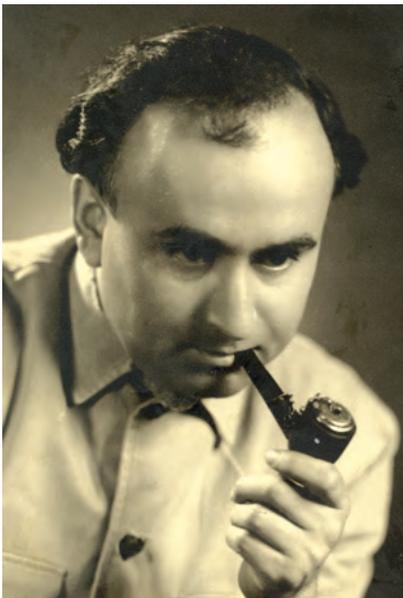
Kathy moved to his Aunt Fatima's home in Fordsbury in January 1938. He was enrolled at the Newtown Indian Primary School and, thanks to Mr David Mtshali's tutoring, was promoted several times to a higher grade.

At the age of nine, Kathy first came across the name of Dr Yusuf Dadoo, a pivotal figure and leader in the Indian community and a revolutionary devoted to the Communist Party of South Africa. Dr Dadoo was an inspiring, charming and defiant political activist who promoted the concept of non-racial unity, communism, women empowerment and active resistance against discriminatory laws.

"More relevant, for me was the unity and equality of all oppressed people. Was this not the basis for my own upbringing? As time passed, I learnt more and more about Dr Dadoo, but little did I know about the impact he would have on my own future. During my school years he fulfilled my childhood yearning for a hero, and he would hold that position throughout my life." *Memoirs 2004:29*

Kathy's attraction and respect for Dr Dadoo began the awakening of his own political awareness. His own activism began by attending meetings and gradually moved on to distributing leaflets, putting up posters, painting slogans on walls and volunteering for campaigns.

Through these political actions Kathy met and began to associate with fellow activists who would become life-long friends like Ismail 'IC' Meer, the Vassen family,



Dr Yusuf Dadoo was an inspiration to the young Kathy

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*Mrs Aminabai Pahad,
Kathy's 'second mother'*

Mervy Thandray and the brothers Molvi and Yusuf Cachalia. In 1941 when he joined the Young Communist League he befriended individuals such as Paul Joseph, Duma Nokwe, Harold Wolpe, Reggie Vandeyar and Ruth First.

Kathy's most precious relationship in Johannesburg was with his 'second mother', Mrs Amina Pahad. It was Aminabai who helped soften the homesickness that assailed him while he was away from home. She did so by feeding him, mentoring his embryonic political consciousness and demonstrating care and attentiveness. It was a relationship which he valued for all of his days.

In July 1943, five years after Kathy had left home, his father was travelling on a train from Johannesburg to Schweizer-Reneke when he fell ill and died shortly thereafter. Upon his passing, his eldest brother Solly became the head of the Kathrada household.

Kathy's charm, intellect and sense of humour, coupled with his growing political awareness and commitment would, even in his early years, marks him as one who would contribute to shaping the history of South Africa.



High School, Johannesburg

Revolutionary Activism



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The early years of Kathy's political activism gave him a solid foundation for the frenetic political activity that would follow over the next two decades. The new emerging leadership began to develop and implement policies and programmes markedly different from the passive ones pursued by the leaders they were replacing.

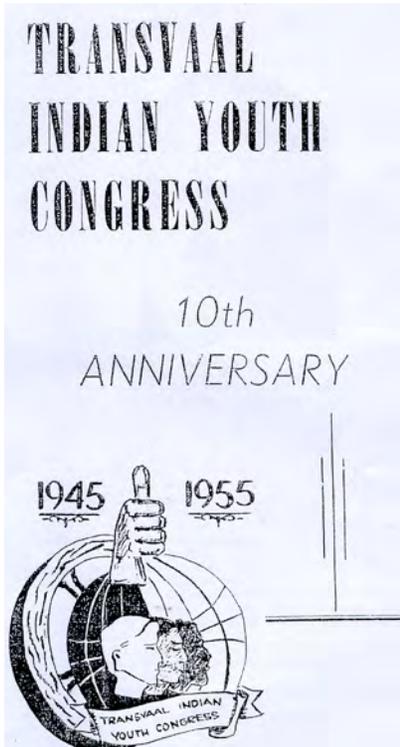
In the 1940s, the rise of the 'Nationalist Bloc' of the Transvaal Indian Congress and the Natal Indian Congress, led by Dr Yusuf Dadoo and Dr Monty Naicker, marked a shift to militant politics and cooperation with the African National Congress. The ANC Youth League led by Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela also propelled the ANC into a radical direction.

DF Malan's National Party (NP) government followed up its unexpected election victory in 1948 with a massive social restructuring programme, which included the enactment of new apartheid laws, as well as the stricter application of existing discriminatory legislation such as the Pass laws and amendments to the Immorality Act. The apartheid policy of the nationalist government was a process which sought to deny political representation and participation of black people at all levels of government and which affected all sectors and all classes within the black communities. It was this that provided a context for the mounting tide of popular resistance to the apartheid state in the 1950s.



Dr Dadoo addressing a meeting at Red Square, Fordsburg

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Oliver Tambo at Kholvad House

The intensification of all political activities would directly affect the trajectory of Kathy's life over the next seven decades. At the tender age of twelve Kathy joined the Young Communist League. He was involved in the anti-war campaign of the Non-European United Front, was active against the Pegging Act (anti-Indian legislation) in 1941 and collected funds for the Bengal famine relief of 1943.

At the age of 17 Kathy participated in the Passive Resistance Campaign against the "Ghetto Act" (Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act) mounted by the Indian Congresses. He gave up his schooling to work fulltime at the office of the Passive Resistance Council and was one of two thousand people arrested and imprisoned for defying a law that discriminated against Indians. This was his first jail sentence for civil disobedience.

Kathy was a founding member of the Transvaal Indian Youth Volunteer Corps that helped in the Passive Resistance Campaign, and was elected secretary-general of its successor, the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress, later to become its chair.

As the alliance between the ANC and Indian Congresses developed, he came into close contact with Nelson Mandela (whom he first met in 1945), Walter Sisulu, JB Marks and other leaders of the liberation movement. As secretary of the Youth Action Committee he worked tirelessly to promote joint action by the youth wings of the Congresses.

Kholvad House

At Ismail Meer's suggestion he moved into Flat 13, Kholvad House, Market Street in 1947. Meer completed his studies in 1948 and returned to Durban. Meer arranged with the owner to allow Kathy to continue to occupy the flat.

Kholvad House would become a key meeting point for prominent political activists during this time. ANC president Chief Albert Luthuli occasionally stayed there as did Rev Michael Scott, an Anglican priest and human rights activist. Other visitors included Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Advocate Duma Nokwe, Robert Resha, Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Tommy and Bob Vassen, Aggie Patel, Dr Chota Motala, George Peake, Alex La Guma and Reggie September.

After the law firm of Mandela and Tambo closed in 1960, Mandela continued to do whatever legal work he could. Numerous lawyers offered their offices, staff and other facilities, "but most of the time I preferred to work from Ahmed Kathrada's flat, No. 13! Kholvad House. ... Soon, the lounge of No. 13 and the passage outside were crammed with clients. Kathy would return home and discover that the only room in which he could be alone was in his kitchen." *Long Walk to Freedom* 1994:301

When Kathy was under house arrest, one of the restrictions was the prohibition of visitors. But his neighbour, Mrs Sarah Mogalia, arranged with different neighbours to take turns in sending him food. Every evening, just after 6pm, a group of little girls would bring him the food, each carrying a different dish. They would not be regarded as prohibited visitors and they each received chocolates from Kathy. These Kholvad House

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Nelson Mandela at Kholvad House

kids became experts at recognising the police. Whenever they noticed a strange white person entering, they would run up the fire escape, shouting: 'Uncle, uncle, police!'

After living there for seventeen years, he was instructed by the leadership to leave the flat and go underground. Because he was given only about four hours to do so, he decided to leave everything in the hands of Ameen Cajee, his friend and flat mate. Cajee and his family lived there for the 26 years that Kathy was incarcerated and immediately made it available to him upon his release. Kathy took advantage of the offer and stayed there for a short period but later returned the flat to Ameen.

Going Abroad

In 1951, Kathy was selected by the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress as a delegate to visit Berlin to attend the World Youth Festival, jointly organised by the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS). From there he went to Poland, where he visited the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, which left an indelible impression on him. He finally travelled to Budapest and worked at the headquarters of the World Federation of Democratic Youth for nine months.



In Budapest, Hungary with various delegates, 1951

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26 June 1952, opening of the Defiance Campaign at Red Square, Fordsburg



26 June 1952, opening of the Defiance Campaign at Red Square, Fordsburg



Freedom Charter adopted on 26 June 1955

"Before the end of 1951, news reached me from home about plans to launch a joint defiance campaign, including strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience. ... In far off Budapest, I became restless and increasingly homesick. I was all of twenty three, and smitten by the bug of self-sacrifice and an exaggerated sense of what I could contribute to the unfolding drama. The urge to go home became almost an obsession." *Memoirs 2004:93*

Defiance Campaign

Returning to South Africa, he immersed himself in the organisation of the Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws that was jointly launched by the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress in 1952.

Groups of volunteers went into action, small in number but high in spirit. During the campaign, acts of defiance were accompanied by freedom songs and the thumbs-up sign (introduced by the Cape ANC in 1949 as a sign of unity), cries of 'Afrika!' and 'Mayibuye!' and cheers from supporting onlookers. The Defiance Campaign witnessed over eight thousand people of all races courting imprisonment.

Although the offences and penalties were minor, the government still became concerned and reacted with the arrest of national leaders of the campaign in Johannesburg and the Eastern Cape. All were charged under the Suppression of Communism Act but were released on bail. The trial of amongst others, Walter Sisulu, JB Marks, Nelson Mandela, Yusuf Dadoo and Kathy began in November. On 2 December 1952, all twenty were found guilty of 'statutory communism' and sentenced to nine month's imprisonment with hard labour, but this was suspended for two years.

In 1953 Kathy was elected to the executive of the World Federation of Democratic Youth. He joined the protests against the Bantu Education Act of 1954, which enforced rigid segregation in schools, and was active in the campaign against the removal of Africans from Sophiatown in Johannesburg. The regime then served banning orders on him, prohibiting him from attending gatherings and from membership of a long list of organisations.

In 1954 the Congress Alliance launched the Campaign for the Congress of the People which saw thousands of volunteers canvassing South Africans on their vision for a free South Africa. Although he was banned, Kathy helped organise the Congress of the People which adopted the Freedom Charter on 26 June 1955.

Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada are the only three individuals who appeared in the three major trials of the 1950s and 1960s: Defiance Campaign (1952), Treason Trial (1956-1961) and the Rivonia Trial (1963).

"The Picasso Club's true forte lay in slogan writing. All of us...were constantly on the lookout for suitable walls to convey, in the briefest and most effective manner, the particular campaign message of the time. The underlying idea was to gain maximum exposure, not only on the wall, but hopefully also in the press." *Memoirs: 2004:77*

Picasso Club

During the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign, Kathy and some of his close comrades formed what became known as the Picasso Club. The Picasso Club consisted primarily of Mosie Moola, Solly Esakjee, Herbie Pillay, and Babla Saloojee. Besides pamphlet distribution and putting up posters, their main task was political graffiti.

One of their slogans that did make it in the papers was 'Let Us Black Folks Read' along the walls of the Johannesburg Public Library which was for the exclusive use of whites. They had used pitch-black tar paint, and the municipality had to sandblast the wall to get rid of the paint. They waited for a while and returned to the wall to paint the slogan 'We Black Folks Ain't Reading Yet.'

The Picasso Club continued its activities until the early 1960s.



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"We have said that the time is coming when we must begin to change these things and that the time is past for us to just sit. We want to be up and about. We want to be doing things in a peaceful manner, not in the uncivilised manner of Mr Swart, not by brute force. We want to change this country into a happy country; a beautiful country. Instead of breaking down Sophiatown we want to build up Sophiatown. Instead of dividing this country into group areas we want all the people to live more and more together and if that is Treason, then tell Mr. Swart that as far as I am concerned, as far as the people of South Africa are concerned, we will continue to commit Treason and no force on earth is going to stop us."

Speech by Ahmed Kathrada at a Meeting of People's Defence Committee held after the Arrests of Leaders on Charges of High Treason.

20 December 1956



Disguised as Pedro Pereira

Treason Trial

In 1956, Kathy was among the 156 Congress activists and leaders charged for High Treason. He went through the marathon Treason Trial until the acquittal of the last batch of the accused in March 1961. Even during the trial, he continued his political work. The regime restricted Kathy to Johannesburg in 1957. While they were on trial, in 1960, the ANC and PAC were banned. Kathy was detained, with the other defendants, when a State of Emergency was proclaimed after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

"The trial was so boring, at times, some of us resorted to discreet forms of entertainment in court, including books of cartoon. One day, Stanley Lollan and I decided to circulate an Andy Capp book among our co-accused and observe their various reactions. Some were obviously amused, some indifferent, and a few simply could not fathom what was going on. A few hours later I received a note, 'Comrade,' it said, 'what has all this to do with Marxism-Leninism?' " *Memoirs 2004: 126*

Going Underground

By the time Kathy joined the newly formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in 1961, he had already been a veteran of the struggle for twenty years. Kathy recalled that he was among MK's earliest recruits, and also served "on the regional command that identified potential targets even before the official launch of the armed wing on 16 December 1961". He was a member of a unit that carried out modest sabotage with the dual purpose of assessing targets and testing the efficacy of their equipment.

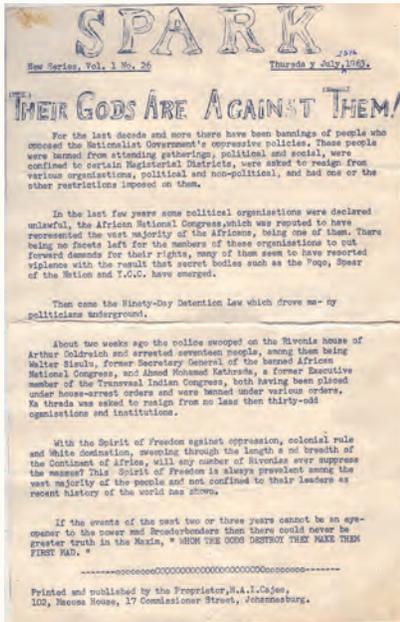
However, Kathy soon realised that his aptitude lay in doing political work rather than in the military field. After consultation with close comrades, he terminated his membership of the Regional Command of MK during early 1962. Kathy stated that... "at no time did I object in principle to the decision to move to an armed struggle, and I have never harboured the slightest regret about MK's formation." *Memoirs 2004: 142*

Kathy's five-year banning order expired in January 1962 and was only re-issued nine months later. He used this respite travelling across the length and breadth of South Africa for various personal and political reasons. He spent several weeks in Cape Town. At Moses Kotane's request, he twice drove the ANC and SACP leader to Groutville, near Durban, to visit Chief Luthuli, who was banned and restricted to his home.

During this period, Kathy was part of a small committee that was responsible for the transport and security of Nelson Mandela who was also operating underground. They made arrangements for Mandela to illegally leave South Africa to canvass support from the newly independent African countries for both the ANC and MK. And upon Mandela's return in July 1962, Kathy drove with Walter Sisulu to the then Bechuanaland to make the necessary arrangements for Mandela's safe return to South Africa.

A few weeks later, after reporting to Chief Luthuli on his trip to Africa, Mandela was arrested on 5 August 1962, near Howick. Kathy became secretary of the Free Mandela Committee, and launched the "Free Mandela" campaign that was to develop into one

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Reporting on the raid on Liliesleaf, Rivonia

of the greatest international campaigns in later years. Together with Joe Slovo, who was Madiba's lawyer, Kathy consulted with Mandela on numerous occasions, and attended the opening of the trial at the Old Synagogue in Pretoria. This drew the attention of the Security Police, and by that evening Kathy was slapped with house arrest, becoming the second person after Helen Joseph to be placed under house arrest. It meant Kathy was restricted to his home, Flat 13, Kholvad House, and could not receive any visitors.

Soon after the arrest of Reggie Vandeyar, Indres Naidoo and Shirish Nanabhai for MK activities on 17 April 1963, Kathy was instructed by the SACP to go underground, to vacate Flat 13, and relocate to Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia.

Kathy donned a disguise and assumed a new identity as the Portuguese Pedro Perreira. After a short spell at Liliesleaf, he moved to a garden cottage in Mountain View, a Johannesburg suburb.

Kathy returned to Liliesleaf for a meeting of various people, including the MK High Command, to discuss the document 'Operation Mayibuye'. In a nutshell, the document motivated the move from a campaign of sabotage to one of guerrilla warfare. The debates were fierce and ongoing, and dragged on for a number of days.

Rivonia Trial

On an ill-fated day, 11 July 1963, Liliesleaf farm was raided, and Kathy was arrested with all those who were present and held under the 90 days detention law. Thereafter, Kathy was charged under the Sabotage Act, in what infamously became known as the Rivonia Trial.

The Rivonia Trial is often referred to as 'the trial that changed South Africa'. In October 1963, eleven leading opponents of apartheid went on trial for their lives on charges of sabotage.

In November 1963 Kathy along with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Denis Goldberg, Elias Motsoaledi, Rusty Bernstein, James Kantor and Andrew Mlangeni appeared in the Pretoria Supreme Court charged on two counts of sabotage. The eleventh person, Bob Hepple, agreed to be a state witness was released and soon thereafter fled the country.

The specific charges the accused faced were: (1) recruiting persons for training in the preparation and use of explosives and in guerrilla warfare for the purpose of violent revolution and committing acts of sabotage; (2) conspiring to commit the aforementioned acts and to aid foreign military units when they invaded the Republic; (3) acting in these ways to further the objects of communism; and (4) soliciting and receiving money for these purposes from sympathisers in Algeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Tunisia, and elsewhere.



Dr Dadoo and Joe Slovo demonstrating in London, 1963

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Yutar: Did you have confidence in those irresponsible leaders of the ANC?

Kathrada: I have said that I regard the leadership of the ANC as responsible. I have said that those who have been in Umkhonto have been forced to resort to these methods. I have the fullest admiration for their courage, and when you talk of responsibility, I also know that members of the Ossewa Brandwag (a Nationalist supported, extreme right-wing Afrikaner movement which existed during the second world war) committed acts of sabotage when they had the vote and they had every other means of expressing themselves in this country. They resorted to sabotage and some of them are in the government today....

Yutar: You are a member of the Communist Party?

Kathrada: I am.

Yutar: You are a follower of the Communist Party?

Kathrada: I am.

Yutar: Whose aim and object is to secure freedom for what you call the oppressed people of this country?

Kathrada: For what are the oppressed people in this country.

Yutar: To which doctrine you subscribe?

Kathrada: I do, fully and unequivocally.

Yutar: Are you determined to see the fulfillment of the policy, the aims and objects of the Communist Party?

Kathrada: I still am.

Yutar: Which involves the overthrow of the government of South Africa?

Kathrada: That is so.

Yutar: By force and violence if necessary?

Kathrada: When and if necessary."

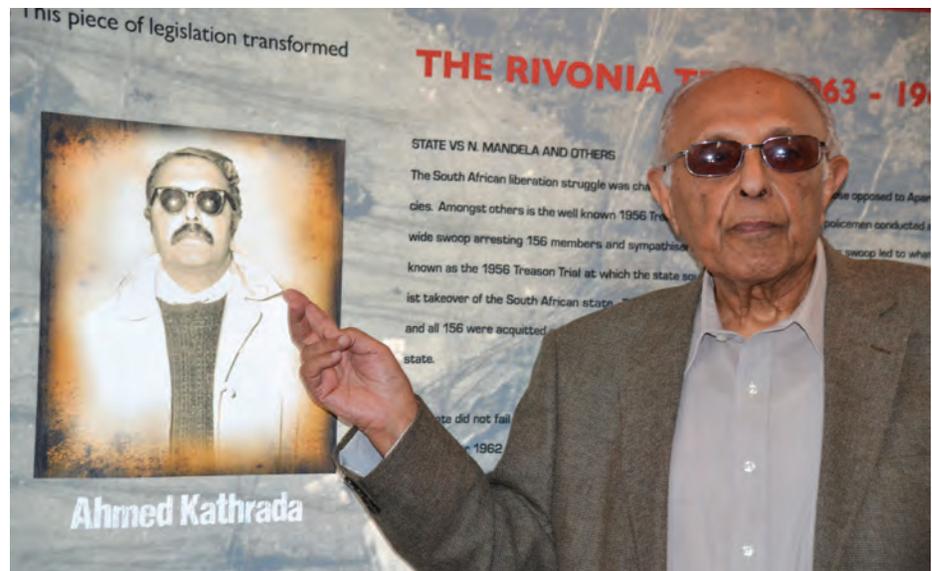
Excerpts of Kathy's cross examination at the Rivonia Trial

The defence team comprised of Joel Joffe, who was the instructing attorney and Bram Fischer, Vernon Berrange, Arthur Chaskalson and George Bizos. The trial judge was Justice Quartus de Wet, with the Prosecution being led by Dr Percy Yutar. The Verwoerd government was hoping for the maximum sentence for the accused i.e. the death penalty. From the outset, the defence team informed their clients that they should expect the worst. All ten accused pleaded not guilty to all charges.

For the accused, the courtroom became a new site of struggle. The defendants' daily appearances in court drew large crowds that filled up the courtroom and streets outside the court. Many supporters were in violation of numerous influx control regulations, and the courts for them too, became new sites of struggle.

The trial ended on 12 June 1964, with the court sentencing eight of the convicted to life imprisonment. Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Motsaedi, Mlangeni, and Goldberg were found guilty on all four counts. The defence had hoped that Mahlaba, Kathrada, and Bernstein might escape conviction due to lack of evidence that they were actually party to the conspiracy. However, Mhlaba was found guilty on all four counts and Kathy was found guilty on one charge of conspiracy. Bernstein and Kantor were acquitted.

Seven of the trialists were incarcerated on Robben Island Prison, and Goldberg was sent to Pretoria Central Prison because white prisoners were not allowed on Robben Island. The life sentences received was seen as a reprieve because they had been expecting the death sentence.





Prisoner 468/64



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The sentence pronounced by the judge at the Rivonia Trial presaged the beginning of a new phase in Kathy's life. The trialists were relieved that they did not receive the death sentence but they now had to contend with the idea of a life sentence. Whereas prisoners who serve a sentence with a defined term can count the time towards their release, a life sentence has an inherent uncertainty.

The trialists spent their last night in Pretoria and at 1am they were woken up and transported by plane to Robben Island, arriving at the crack of dawn. It was a cold winter morning when they were processed and Kathy was given the prison number 468/64 – the four hundred and sixty-eighth prisoner to be admitted to the Island that year.

As per prison regulations, he received long pants as opposed to the short pants received to by his comrades. Prison regulations dictated that Coloured and Indian prisoners were to receive long pants, shoes and socks whilst African prisoners were to get short pants and no socks. Kathy who was the youngest of the seven Rivonia trialists on the island was uncomfortable to see his elders in short pants, especially in the midst of winter. This differentiation also extended to the diet – the amount and type of food varied according to race classification. After his release in 1989, he would remark on this many times when retelling the story of his time in prison.

GEVONNISTE GEVANGENE SENTENCED PRISONER	
Groep B. / / / Group	No. 468/64 Raad No. 1/5725.
Geloof ISLAM Religion	Naam Ahmed M. Kathrada. Name
OPMERKINGS REMARKS	Misdad Sabotasie. Crime
	Vonnis Lewenslank. Sentence
DUIMAFDRUK—THUMB IMPRESSION	Datum van vonnis 12/6/64. Date of sentence
	Datum van ontslag Date of discharge

Kathy's prison card

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B Section

After twelve days, Kathy and the others trialists were transferred to the newly-built B section which had single cells.

"Nothing could have prepared me for the enormity of losing all choice in such mundane matters as deciding when to wake up and when to sleep, or comprehend that minor joys such as letter-writing and meetings with family and friends would be so severely curtailed and controlled, and that fundamental human rights would become privileges that had to be earned and were always under the threat of removal." *Memoirs 2004: 197*



B section housed on average about thirty political prisoners, who were kept in total isolation from the other political and common law prisoners on the Island. Over time, they would find innovative ways of communicating with the other political section, and Kathy served on the Communications Committee which was tasked with doing this, and to somehow get news of what was happening in the world beyond the Island.

To break the monotony and isolation of prison life, and to take some control of their lives as was possible under those harsh conditions, the prisoners set up various committees tasked with specific duties. The ANC members on the Island also established a committee called the "High Organ" with the most senior ANC prisoners serving on it permanently – Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba and Nelson Mandela. A fifth member was co-opted from time-to-time, with Kathy serving on a few occasions.

By 1965, they started work in the lime quarry with picks and shovels. This was hard physical work, and Kathy had difficulty adjusting to the use of picks and wheelbarrows laden with stones. The daily glare of the sun on the white limestone cliffs damaged their eyes, especially those of Nelson Mandela who was initially not allowed to wear sunglasses.



B section had people from all the different liberation organisations besides the ANC, such as the Pan Africanist Congress, the Unity Movement, the Black Consciousness Movement and the Liberal Party. Despite political differences and rivalries, the Islanders learnt to cooperate, respect each other and unite in the fight for better prison conditions.

Kathy made life-long friends with a number of these prisoners including Eddie Daniels from the Liberal Party and Kwedi Mkalipi from the PAC. He counted Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Mac Maharaj and Laloo Chiba as his closest friends and comrades. After his release Kathy would have breakfast with Laloo Chiba every Wednesday in Lenasia, Johannesburg where Laloo lived after his release from prison in 1982. Kathy notes:

"In the absence of meaningful contact with the outside world and curtailment of our interaction with family members, the relationships we formed with our fellow prisoners became as strong as any family bond. My closest friends were Laloo Chiba, Eddie

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Daniels and Walter Sisulu. I regarded Walter as a father figure and Laloo as a brother." *Memoirs 2004:280*

Losing Family and Friends

Soon after their arrival on the Island, they heard the tragic news of Molly Fischer's death due to a motor vehicle accident. Molly and her husband Bram were on their way to Cape Town to attend their daughter Ilse's twenty-first birthday celebration, and to visit the Rivonia trialists on the Island. Kathy and his comrades were 'shaken to the core' to hear of the tragic news. And when Ma Albertina Sisulu visited Walter Sisulu she brought the news of Babla Saloojee's death in detention on 9 September 1964.

"Suliman Saloojee, my dearest friend Babla was dead, killed by the police. This most gentle of men, this inveterate prankster, my comrade and source of strength...His death and the nature of it, filled me with grief and rage such as I have seldom known." *Memoirs 2004: 207*

In 1972 Kathy's mother passed away. Kathy had last seen her about ten years before. In a letter to his family Kathy reflects:

"In jail, I have often reflected over the fact that I have been a constant source of worry and trouble to Ma, and to all of you. I have lived with the slight feeling of guilt, and have thought of ways and means of making good. But now Ma has been removed from us and I've been deprived of the opportunity...We have always been a close-knit family, and our attachment to one another, and to Ma, has therefore been greater. Consequently

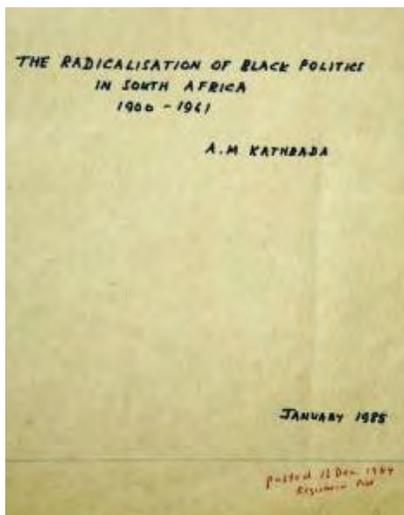


The death of Bram Fischer's wife Molly, deeply affected the Rivonia trialists

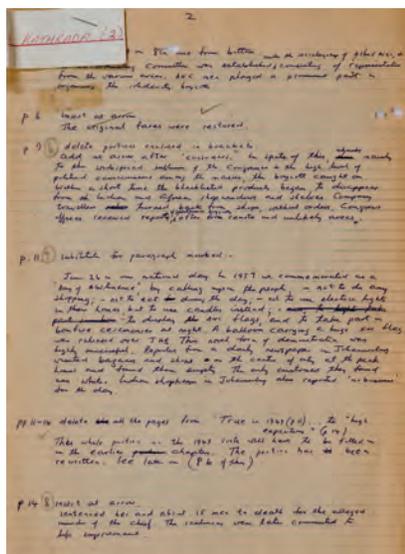


Babla Saloojee's funeral, September 1964

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Kathy's thesis whilst at Robben Island



Kathy's comments on Long Walk to Freedom

we will all feel her loss a lot more. Yet we realise that the procession of life moves on. While we honour, remember and always commemorate the dead, we have to think of the present and the future – of the living, especially the young one. We must continue to behave to one another, and to remain as a whole in a manner which would have made Ma happy. That would be the best way of honouring her memory." *Memoirs 2004:250-251*

Studies

Prisoners were allowed to study but could only register for studies if the money was forthcoming from their immediate family. Kathy who had dropped out of school in his matric year to participate fully in the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign, successfully completed two undergraduate degrees, BA and BBibl – in history, criminology, African politics and library science. He also completed BA Honours in African studies and history; all through the University of South Africa (UNISA), the long distance education university.

However many inmates were either illiterate or whose families could not afford to pay for their universities studies. They were taught informally by those prisoners who had been teachers or already had tertiary degrees. These teachers went on to form the Robben Island Teachers Association (RITA). Kathy benefitted from this development and was especially grateful to Neville Alexander for helping him with his studies. All political prisoners by the time that they were released had learnt to read and write. Kathy also served as the librarian for the B Section, and this was a really useful way of keeping in touch with the general section.

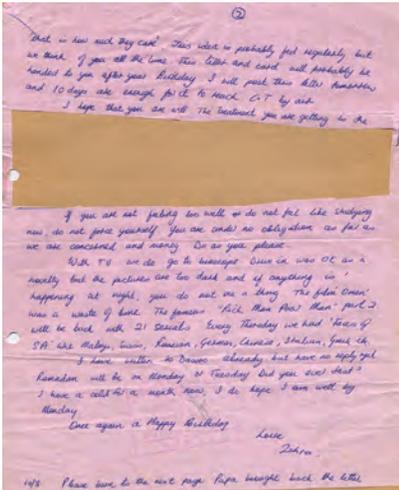
Besides academic education, the ANC members also had to undergo political education. The syllabus consisted of subjects such as the history of the ANC, the history of the trade union movement and international relations.

There was a constant battle on the Island for better prison conditions, the arbitrary withholding of rights and privileges by warders, especially of being kept in solitary confinement and the taking away of study rights. One of the methods the prisoners used was to embark on hunger strikes. Another was legal action. Through these actions prison conditions did improve. African prisoners were given long pants by 1967, games were allowed, the diet improved, and most crucially after 1975 they finally were able to have hot showers. Kathy recalled that he would have to wake up extra early to have the hot shower before it ran out!

Chronicling Mandela's Life

In 1975, Kathy and Walter Sisulu suggested to Nelson Mandela that he writes his autobiography to have it ready to be published for his sixtieth birthday in 1978. After deliberation by the High Organ, it was decided that they should proceed with the project. Mac Maharaj was due to be released in December 1976 and he would smuggle the manuscript out. Work on the manuscript began in January 1976. Kathy explains:

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Censored letter Kathy received

"Chronicling Mandela's life was illegal and dangerous. Discovery would result in harsh collective punishment...knowledge of it was to be limited to those directly involved. Because most of the writing would have to be done at night, Mandela feigned illness and was excused from the daily work schedule. He slept for a few hours while the cellblock was deserted and wrote deep into the night...Early morning he would give Walter and me the written pages for comment. The final draft was then transferred to sheets of rice paper by Mac Maharaj and Laloo Chiba in miniscule script...Madiba's originals were rolled up inside empty cocoa canisters and buried in our garden." *Memoirs 2004:65*

Although Mac Maharaj successfully managed to smuggle the manuscript it was never published for Mandela's sixtieth birthday. It however formed the basis of his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* published in 1994.

A duplicate copy of the manuscript was discovered by the prison authorities when they decided to build a wall. As a consequence Kathy lost his study privileges for four years.

Transfer to Pollsmoor Prison

On 21 October 1982, Kathy was suddenly transferred to Pollsmoor prison on the mainland, in the City of Cape Town's suburb of Tokai. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Andrew Mlangeni and Raymond Mhlaba had been transferred in April 1982. Kathy was reunited with them but he missed Robben Island.

"I did not much care for Pollsmoor. Strange as it may seem, I missed the island – not the prison or the pettiness of the warders, but the "family" we had formed in B section, and the setting...Pollsmoor was a concrete edifice, cold and mean." *Memoirs 2004:311*

It was at Pollsmoor that on 8 February 1985 the five were offered conditional release from prison, provided that they undertook not to fuel the flames of the uprising that was sweeping the country. The offer was rejected in a letter to P W Botha dated 13 February 1985. Kathy wrote to Paul Joseph:

"To many, it may have seemed as if we were a hair's breath away from 'freedom'. But in fact, from the very moment that the announcement was made, it was a non-starter. Now I don't want to indulge in any false modesty when I say that I haven't got the stuff that heroes are made of; but really I didn't have to go through any sleepless nights to arrive at the decision. It was so patently designed to humiliate us that there just could be no other decision for me but to reject it." *Memoirs 2004:316*

After Nelson Mandela's prostrate surgery in 1985, he was separated from his comrades and moved to another part of the prison. Soon thereafter the remaining four were also moved – Kathy and Walter Sisulu shared a cell and Andrew Mlangeni and Raymond Mhlaba shared another. Kathy says that the "most memorable years of my incarceration were those when I was privileged to have Walter as my cellmate." *Memoirs 2004:318*



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In December 1988 they were taken to meet Mandela at Victor Verster prison, and then again on 14 July 1989. Elias Motsoaledi who was the only Rivonia Trialist still on Robben Island was included in this visit. Kathy was to visit Madiba once more and then all of them were taken to visit Madiba on 10 October 1985.

“We really didn’t believe Madiba when he told us: ‘Chaps, this is a goodbye visit.’ He had met with two cabinet ministers that very morning, and although he did not know the exact date, he was sure our release was imminent. We remained unconvinced.” *Memoirs 2004:330*

On Friday, 13 October 1989 Kathy together with Walter Sisulu, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Wilton Mkwayi and Oscar Mpetha were flown to Johannesburg and were taken to Diepkloof Prison known as “Sun City” where they found Japhta ‘Jeff’ Masemola. On the morning of Sunday, 15 October, the eight were released and driven by convoy to their various destinations.

Kathy describes what happened when he knocked at six am on the door of his brother’s home in Lenasia:

“No one had told them I was coming that morning, but it took less than fifteen minutes for the news to be all over Lenasia, and for well-wishers to arrive. My dear friend and comrade Lalloo Chiba was the first. Within a few hours there were hundreds of people in and outside the house, and someone had draped a huge ANC flag over the balcony...Except for a few indelible memories, most of that first day has always been a blank. My most precious recollections are of my little grand-nieces and nephews, clambering all over me, clasping their little arms around my neck, holding my hands, hugging and kissing this strange man that they had never seen, but had learnt to love in absentia. After twenty six years on my own, no other welcome could have meant as much as this spontaneous display of unconditional love and immediate acceptance.” *Memoirs 2004:332*

After spending 26 years, 3 months and 4 days in jail which amounted to 9593 days, Kathy was finally free.



Building the New South Africa



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The early 1990s heralded a new phase in Kathy's life. In the aftermath of his own release in 1989 and the dramatic events of February 1990 – the unbanning of the liberation movements and the release of Nelson Mandela – Kathy dedicated himself to building a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa.

The early years of the transition witnessed unprecedented public displays of jubilation at the newly unbanned organisations, release of political prisoners and the return of exiles.

Kathy was at the forefront of these developments. His speech at a capacity-filled Soccer City stadium on 29 October 1989 captured the imagination of the nation. He movingly described how a visit to the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in Poland shortly after the Second World War made an indelible impact on him and renewed his commitment to fighting an unjust system.

After Madiba's release, Kathy accompanied his old comrade on his first visit abroad, where they met the leadership of the ANC in Lusaka and were reunited with Oliver Tambo in Sweden, where the ANC president was recuperating from a serious stroke.



15 October 1989 - the day Kathy was released

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Reunited with family

Family and Friends

Kathy was actively re-building relationships with family and old friends and comrades, many of whom were banned, exiled or imprisoned. He was also establishing new friendships with activists who emanated from the Mass Democratic Movement.

It is during this time that Kathy met Barbara Hogan, with whom he started a romantic relationship, his first after almost three decades of incarceration. Some years later they married. Barbara was sentenced to ten years in prison in the early 1980s for furthering the aims of a banned organisation and inadvertently became the first woman to be found guilty of high treason. The two ex-jailbirds decided to spend the rest of their lives together.

In 1992, Kathy accompanied his brother Solly and his family on the Hajj pilgrimage to the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Although Kathy's initial motivation was to fulfil his mother's dying wishes, he found the experience deeply moving. He was inspired by the pilgrims emanating from all corners of the world who were united by a common faith. Kathy was greatly saddened when he learnt that his brother had suddenly died at Jeddah airport after he had boarded his flight and was unable to take part in the funeral rites.

The years of transition were filled with high hope and pronounced danger. Kathy was a high profile and popular leader of the ANC and it was expected that he would play a key role in the unfolding drama.



Kathy and his siblings - Essop, Amina, Ahmed, Ebrahim and Solly Kathrada

Building the ANC

The ANC decided that the mainstay of its strategy during this time would be the re-establishment of the organisation in the country. This would entail building a mass organisation coupled with heightened mobilisation.



Kathy and Oliver Tambo

In 1990, the ANC Lenasia Branch was the first to be set up in the PWV Region (later Gauteng Province) and Kathy was enrolled as the first member. When Kathy was arrested at Rivonia, his iconic home address was Flat 13, Kholvad House, 27 Market Street, Johannesburg. Upon his release, he was received in Lenasia at his brother's house and this became his "new home" until his election to Parliament in 1994.

In 1991, at the first national conference since its unbanning, the ANC elected Nelson Mandela as its president. Kathy was elected as a member of the National Executive Committee and appointed as head of public relations.

The liberation movement had committed itself to a negotiated transition to democracy. Kathy was involved in all the major events including the Groote Schuur Minute in May 1990, the establishment of the Convention for Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and its resumption, in the form of the Kempton Park Negotiations.

At this time, the ANC established its new headquarters at Shell House in Johannesburg. He was a key functionary of the Department of Information and Publicity, whose responsibility was the public face of the organisation.



Nelson Mandela addressing a Lenasia meeting

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"It did not take long for me to wake up to the realities of the South Africa to which we had returned. More than three centuries of apartheid had left a legacy of massive poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, homelessness and – above all – racial polarisation and state-orchestrated violence." *Memoirs 2004:368*

Political Violence

Indeed, political violence had become endemic across the country. Lurking behind most of the political violence was the invisible hand of the "Third Force". This was really a short hand for the security establishment's efforts to destabilise the passage to peace and democracy.

Political violence manifested itself in a number of different forms. Police action against anti-apartheid resistance often led to the loss of lives, such as the killings in Sebokeng in March 1990, where 12 people lost their lives. This heavy handedness continued throughout the early transition years.

There were terrorist attacks by white, far right-wing groups, including a bomb planted by the Wit Wolwe in July 1990 that injured over 25 people. Work of the apartheid "Hit Squads" continued. Bheki Mlangeni, a human rights lawyer and ANC activist, was killed by a parcel bomb in February 1991; that was followed later that year by the explosion of a letter bomb in the hands of Father Michael Lapsley, an Anglican priest and activist. He lost both his hands and an eye in the incident.

Conflict in Natal between supporters of Inkatha and the liberation movement that started in the 1980s, proved to be intractable, and continued unabated. This conflict spilled over into urban townships of the Reef. Inkatha supporters went on rampage in Kagiso township in 1991, killing at least 22 people.

Political violence in 1993 severely tested the peace process in the country. On 10 April 1993, Chris Hani, the General Secretary of the SACP and NEC member of the ANC was assassinated by Polish immigrant Janusz Walus, acting in collusion with right-winger Clive Derby-Lewis. This was followed in June 1993 by the Boipatong massacre that left 46 people dead.

"Then came the dastardly assassination of Comrade Chris Hani, the widely revered and charismatic ANC and Communist Party leader. This single act propelled South Africa to the brink of a bloodbath, the like of which had never been seen before. The situation called for utmost calm, courage, statesmanship and foresight. President FW de Klerk's government found itself in a state of panic, confusion, helplessness and impotence. In this atmosphere of unprecedented tension, ANC president Nelson Mandela rushed to Johannesburg from the Transkei and was asked to appear on television. His simple forceful words saved the country from imminent disaster ... The country responded positively to his appeal for peace, and that night, a full year before his inauguration, Mandela effectively became the president of South Africa." *Memoirs 2004:368*



Kathy with his nephew-in-law Samad Saloojee during Hajj in 1992

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Kathy was moved by the passing of Oliver Tambo, soon after Hani's death. He recalled that the former ANC president worked tirelessly to direct resistance at home and mobilised unparalleled international support for the struggle against apartheid. "I always regarded Madiba, OR and Walter Sisulu as the Triumvirate, bound to one another by unshakeable loyalty and selfless admiration." *Memoirs 2004:368-9.*

Campaigning for the ANC

The multiparty negotiations had been rocky from the start. It was always going to be difficult to bring together diverse and antagonistic political formations to one table and get them to agree to negotiate a unified arrangement for the country. This was compounded by ongoing efforts to destabilise the talks by forces that were party to the negotiations as well as those who chose to stay out. In the event, the negotiations yielded an interim Constitution and a date for an election on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

During this time, Kathy worked tirelessly, speaking to ambassadors and visiting delegations; doing innumerable media interviews; meeting hundreds of people and organisations; addressing meetings of thousands of people across the length and breadth of the country; and travelling to many countries across the world.



Kathy, Eddie Daniels, Barbara Hogan and Laloo Chiba

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A selection of entries in Kathy's 1994 diary, up to the 27 April election, gives a flavour of his day-to-day activities:

- 14-16 January: NEC and list conference
- 21-23 January: Laudium house meetings
- 25 January: Grand Imam of Medina
- 27 January: India Independence Day reception
- 29 January: Manifesto launch
- 30 January: Re-ordination of Dr Gerrie Lubbe
- 2 February: Victor Verster Prison
- 4-6 February: Louis Trichardt
- 6 February: Greyville People's Forum
- 11 February: Nelson Mandela – Robben Island
- 12 February: Bobby Vassen
- 14 February: Billy Cobbett – Housing development
- 15 February: Candidates meeting
- 17 February: Penuell Maduna – Uppington judgement
- 24 February: Meeting Transvaal and Natal Jamiats & Muslim Judicial Council
- 28 February: Algerian delegation; Opening of ANC Press Centre
- 4 March: ANC Foreign Policy launch
- 7 March: Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Lakhdar Brahimi
- 9 March: Ennerdale teachers' meeting
- 12 March: Launch of Chris Hani biography; Lenz candidates' meeting
- 13 March: Arrival Molvi Cachalia arrival
- 16 March: Northern Natal Peoples Forum; Laying wreath at train disaster; Chatsworth rally
- 17 March: COSAS Pietermaritzburg
- 19 March: Lenasia Yuvak Mandal
- 20 March: Nelson Mandela
- 23 March: Lenasia Public meeting
- 24 March: Roshnee public meeting
- 27 March: Gandhi Walk; Lenasia Extension 10 People's Forum
- 28 March: Actonville People's Forum; Congress of Business & Economics dinner
- 29 March: Zakiriyya Park mass meeting: SA Jewish Board of Deputies Passover
- 30 March: Klerksdorp
- 2 April: Sheikh Yusuf Tri-centenary
- 5 April: Pietermaritzburg-Howick
- 6 April: Newcastle, Dundee and Estcourt
- 7 April: Northdale mass meeting
- 8 April: Phoenix mosque and Chatsworth mass meeting
- 9 April: Umkomass; Umzinto; meet activists in Ispingo
- 10 April: Church; Arya Samaj; Phoenix Forum; Chris Hani memorial
- 14 April: Yeoville ANC; Mandela/De Klerk debate; Dr Mabane (Nation of Islam)
- 16 April: People's Forum: Kareedorp (PE), Joubertina and Karakeel
- 17 April: Walmer rally; New Brighton Station Defiance re-enactment: Chatty rally
- 20 April: Flat 13 documentary; Azaadville
- 21 April: Lenasia Muslim organisations
- 22 April: National Executive Committee
- 23 April: FNB rally
- 24 April: Lenasia South rally

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On 27 April 1994, Kathy describes the casting of his ballot as a “thrilling experience”. In Lenasia, the sight of thousands of people queueing in a patient and orderly manner brought tears to his eyes. Indeed, the tension that preceded the election up to the final hours all but evaporated across the country on that historic autumn day in 1994. People in the millions waited their turn to cast their vote, signalling the death of the old order and the ushering in of a new one.



Kathy's popularity on the national stage saw him being elected into seventh position on the ANC's proportional representation list to Parliament at the National List conference. The ANC's overwhelming majority in the election meant that he was destined to be among the first crop of parliamentarians in the new South Africa.

Mandela's Parliamentary Counsellor

Kathy said that he was reluctant to become a minister as there were many others far better qualified than he and he lobbied hard for Madiba to comply with his wishes. In the first public announcement, he was named as Minister of Correctional Services, but this was soon revoked by the president when the Inkatha Freedom Party demanded a security portfolio in the Government of National Unity.

Madiba decided that Kathy should become his Parliamentary Counsellor, meaning the president's representative in the legislative arm of government. This suited Kathy because he worked directly in the President's office and meant that he directly advised him on the weighty matters of the state.

“[It was] five years in a multifaceted, demanding, inspiring and fascinating position. We were part of a unique process, as we built a young democracy in what had been a country riddled with oppression, and social and economic fragmentation. We met hundreds of people and travelled widely, both in South Africa and abroad.” *Memoirs 2004:360*

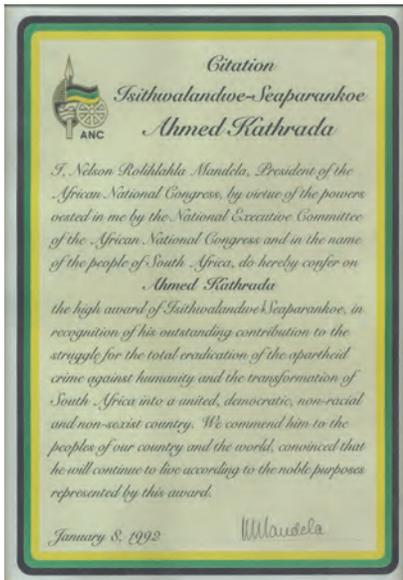
Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Kathy had consistently expressed his abhorrence at the violence engendered by the apartheid regime. Writing about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that commenced its work in 1996 under the chairpersonship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, he recalled that: “... victims of apartheid lined up in their hundreds to bear witness to atrocities perpetrated against them or members of their families.” *Memoirs 2004:339*



He was asked by his close friend and comrade, Laloo Chiba, to accompany him to his TRC hearing. Kathy later said that the first that he heard of the torture endured by Chiba during his interrogation was at the hearing itself, some three decades after it occurred, even though the pair spent eighteen years together on Robben and resumed their friendship when Kathy was released in 1989.

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ANC's highest honour,
Isithwalandwe Seaparankoe,
awarded to Kathy

"Mr Laloo Chiba told the Commission about what appears from other statements to have been a routine experience: There were about five or six people who were actually present in the room. They started assaulting me, punched me, kicked me and in the process my face was badly bruised. My left eardrum had been punctured. They wanted to know who my contact was in MK ... I pleaded ignorance ... The assault must have lasted half an hour or so. It is very, very difficult for me to assess the passage of time in these circumstances. But what was to follow was far more serious ...

Chiba, covered with a wet hessian sack, was then subjected to electric shock treatment:

Every time I resisted answering the questions, they turned on the dynamo and of course, violent electric shocks started passing through my body ... After the electric torture was over, I was unable to walk, I collapsed. They then carried me out.

Mr Rajeegopal Vandeyar described Chiba's condition following this session: His face was swollen severely. His eyes appeared to be coming out of their sockets. He was walking with great difficulty and was supported by a policeman. His legs were rigid. His knees did not bend. His hands were almost like he had severe arthritis. He looked like a Frankenstein monster." <http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports/volume2/chapter3/subsection15>.



Bowing Out

At the ANC's Mafikeng conference in 1997, Kathy stepped down from the National Executive Committee of the ANC. He also decided not to continue as a Member of Parliament in 1999 when he completed his five year term. He decided that he wanted to devote himself to some of the things that he was passionate about.

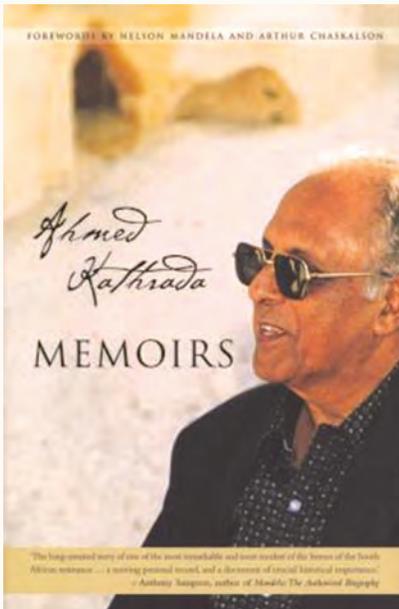


Kathy and Walter Sisulu

Elder Statesman



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Kathy began a new phase of his life in 1999. He turned down the offer to return to Parliament because he wanted to focus on things that he was especially passionate about. He was keen to record his life story and the history of the struggle against apartheid. He also wanted to devote more time to work on Robben Island.

As the years passed, Kathy embraced additional roles on the national stage including his companionship of Nelson Mandela and his interest in building non-racialism in South Africa. This led to the establishment of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which has become a leading anti-racism voice in the country.

Kathy has always been a committed internationalist and has added his name to struggles against despotic rule in places as diverse as Sahrawi Republic, Palestine, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

In the final years of his life, Kathy has spoken out against the erosion of the values that underpinned the democracy established in 1994, including attacks on the Constitution, endemic corruption and gross mismanagement of the state and the economy. Universal respect for his steadfast adherence to principles and his substantial moral standing has earned him the stature of an Elder Statesman.

Memoirs

During his long years in prison, Kathy developed an abiding interest in the history of the struggle against apartheid. The title of his honour's dissertation was 'The Radicalisation of Black Politics in South Africa: 1900-1961' and he was centrally involved in commenting on Madiba's autobiography as it was being written.

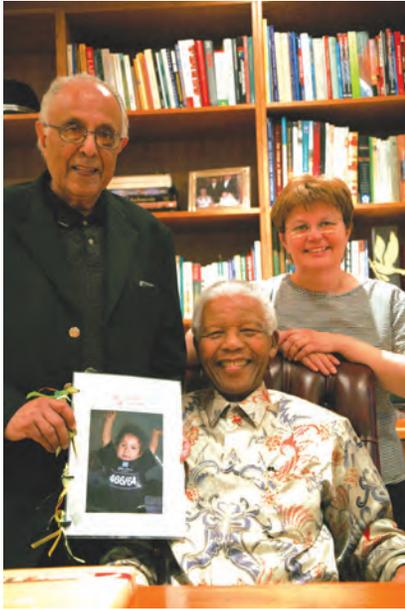
From 1999 onwards, Kathy directly wrote or was indirectly involved in no less than seven books about different aspects of his life. His friend Robert (Bobby) Vassen edited *Letters from Robben Island* (1999), a compilation of letters that Kathy had written during the years of his incarceration. The letters recreate the experiences and lives of those who spent many years in prison – their day-to-day experiences as well as the myriad emotions that they experienced.

Immediately after retiring from Parliament, Kathy devoted several years to writing his biography. Simply entitled *Memoirs* (2004), it is a fascinating book about a modest man who experienced a momentous life. It allows entry into the life of Ahmed Kathrada, a very humble yet very real hero, whose steadfast adherence to the highest ideals helped alter the future of a nation. It offers an essential and all-too-rare view into the mind and soul of a truly great and profoundly gentle revolutionary.

Kathy collaborated with Tim Couzens in compiling *A Simple Freedom: The Strong Mind of Robben Island Prisoner, No. 468/64* (2008). The book contains extracts from poetry, novels, songs, sayings and letters which Kathy secretly transcribed and treasured as he served his life sentence on Robben Island.



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Dear Ahmedbhai Dear Zuleikhabehn (2009), compiled by Goolam Vahed and Thembisa Waetjen, is a collection of letters that chronicles the development of a friendship between a political prisoner and a freelance writer, community organiser and editor of the best-selling cookbook *Indian Delights*.

Triumph of the Human Spirit: Ahmed Kathrada and Robben Island (2015), details Kathy's 300-odd visits to Robben Island since 1994. The book was published by the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and offers a glimpse into the visits and the guests themselves which, amongst others, included heads of state, celebrities, royalty, students, activists, sports personalities and ordinary folk.

- 1999 *Letters from Robben Island* (edited by Robert D Vassen)
- 2004 *Memoirs*
- 2008 *A Simple Freedom: The Strong Mind of Robben Island Prisoner, No. 468/64* (with Tim Couzens)
- 2009 *Dear Ahmedbhai, Dear Zuleikhabehn: The Letters of Zuleikha Mayat and Ahmed Kathrada 1979-1989* (compiled by Goolam Vahed and Thembisa Waetjen)
- 2015 *Triumph of the Human Spirit - Ahmed Kathrada and Robben Island* (edited by Zaakirah Vadi)
- 2017 *Conversations with a Gentle Soul* (with Sahn Venter)

Robben Island

One of Kathy's abiding interests after his release was Robben Island, where he spent the first eighteen out of his twenty-six year incarceration. He was appointed by President Mandela as the chairperson of the Robben Island Museum Council in 1997 and continued in that role even after he had retired from Parliament. He was instrumental in the establishment of the museum in 1997 and it being declared a World Heritage Site in 1999.

Kathy once mentioned that he was a man 'robbed of his retirement years' as he was often called upon by Mandela and others to accompany visiting dignitaries, heads of state, celebrities, royalty, student activists, sports personalities and ordinary folk to Robben Island. In truth, he relished the opportunity to "escape" to Robben Island and re-live his long years there.

Kathy had made more than three hundred trips to the Island since his release and his passion for it had been fuelled by the idea that a place of oppression can be transformed into a place of liberation.

"While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid, we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil; a triumph of wisdom and largeness of

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spirit against small minds and pettiness; a triumph of courage and determination over human frailty and weakness; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old." *Triumph of Human Spirit* 2015:4

An anecdote by visitor to the Island, Niclas Kjellström-Matseke, the CEO of the NovaMedia Swedish Postcode Lottery, illustrates the idea of transforming it into a place of liberation:

"As we made our way back to the harbour, all visibly shaken by what we had just witnessed, we saw a man waiting for us. He was the archetypal Boer, with a big moustache – and a former prison guard. We watched in disbelief. This man eagerly waved to Kathrada, and our guide began to run toward his former jailer, as big smiles broke out on both of their faces. They met in a friends' embrace, and spoke happily of their families and things that had happened since they last met. Theirs was clearly a friendship full of warmth and respect. Our experience in this place gave us Scandinavians the most meaningful lesson we could hope to receive. Although Robben Island bears the scars and pain of its past, it truly symbolises the most beautiful aspect of post-apartheid South Africa: reconciliation."



Standing: Laloo Chiba, Kwedi Mkalipi, Michael Dingake, Eddie Daniels and Kathy Seated: Billy Nair and Nelson Mandela

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Nelson Mandela's Confidant

Nelson Mandela and Kathy both retired from state office in 1999, having served as President and Parliamentary Counsellor respectively. That year, Kathy played a key role in the establishment of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, which was to serve as Madiba's post-presidential office. He was appointed as a board member at its inception and remained one until December 2015. Kathy was involved in several books on Madiba's life which he did by jogging the latter's memory, thereby verifying the facts.



However, Kathy was more than just an associate or colleague of Madiba. The pair spent many decades together in the service of the struggle, on trial for treason and later sabotage and eventually in apartheid prisons, which forged an unshakeable bond. Kathy said that Tata Walter Sisulu was his father and Madiba was his older brother. Kathy was Madiba's confidant and was consulted on many important political and personal issues that confronted the former president.

In his moving eulogy to Nelson Mandela on 15 December 2013 in Qunu, Kathy spoke eloquently and passionately about what Mandela represented to South Africa and the world as well as their special relationship – addressing each other as 'Madala' or old man.

"Madala, while we may be drowned in sorrow and grief, we must be proud and grateful that after the long walk paved with obstacles and suffering, we can salute you as a fighter for freedom in the end. Farewell, my dear brother, my mentor, my leader. With all the energy and determination at our command, we pledge to join the people of South Africa to perpetuate your ideals. When Walter died, I lost a father, and now I have lost a brother. My life is in a void and I don't know who to turn to." *Conversations with a Gentle Soul 2017:11*



Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

In 2008, Kathy was persuaded to set up an institution in his name that would promote the values, initiatives and programmes that he held dear to his heart. Cyril Ramaphosa, inaugural Chairperson of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, speaking at its launch said: "We see the foundation as a critical vehicle to promote and to deepen our understanding of the concept of non-racialism. In so doing, we will be echoing the founding provisions of the Freedom Charter and our country's Constitution, which include the democratic values of human dignity, equality, human rights and non-sexism."

In pursuance of that vision, the foundation set out its detailed objectives as:

- To promote the values, rights and principles enshrined in the Freedom Charter and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa;
- To collect, record, promote and display, through historical artefacts and

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contemporary materials, Kathrada's role in South Africa's liberation struggle and its relationship to the roles of other individuals, groups and movements both nationally and internationally;

- To establish a research and documentation centre that will provide selective historical and contemporary documentation and archival material on liberation history in South Africa and to make this available for academic and scholarly research;
- To organise seminars, lectures, debates and discussions and undertake research on issues which promote a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa;
- To identify and support projects and programmes that will deepen non-racialism and create an equitable society; and
- To build and maintain a centre that will carry out all of the activities and programmes of the foundation.

The Board of Trustees of the Foundation comprises a range of individuals drawn from all sectors of society, armed with a diversity of skills and expertise. The first board was constituted in 2008 and reconstituted in 2015, with Derek Hanekom as the Chairperson and Mandla Nkomfe as the Deputy Chairperson. Neeshan Balton was appointed executive director at the inception and continues to lead a team of fulltime and part time staff at the foundation's offices in Lenasia.

Board of Trustees of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation: Derek Hanekom (Chairperson), Mandla Nkomfe (Deputy Chairperson), Neeshan Balton (Executive Director), Firoz Cachalia, Yunus Chanda, Lalloo Chiba, David Everatt, Barbara Hogan, Edward Kieswetter, David Makhura, Achille Mbembe, Zarina Motala, Kgalema Motlanthe, Prema Naidoo, Razia Saleh, Rashid Seedat, Max Sisulu, Ismail Vadi, Sahn Venter and Sophie Williams-de Bruyn.



Since its establishment, the Foundation has rolled out various campaigns furthering its objectives. These have ranged from book launches, exhibitions and commemorations of individuals and events, documentaries, creation of archives, as well as setting a research agenda and hosting seminars.

Building Non-Racialism

The democratic era ushered in on 27 April 1994, was premised on the idea that racism and racial discrimination should be consigned to history and that freedom and equality should prevail. However, race has been embedded in the structures of society during the colonial and apartheid eras and that ingrained attitudes are not simply erased.

In recent years, there have been many instances when racism has raised its head. These are both the irrational prejudice variety and the deeper structural and institutional

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racism. The Kathrada Foundation has taken the view that this scourge needs to be tackled by a combination of education and learning as well as using the law to clamp down on instances of hate speech.

The Anti-Racism Network of South Africa (ARNSA) was formed in 2016 and is an alliance of organisations working to respond to racism in South Africa. The Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation facilitated the formation of ARNSA and currently serve as the secretariat. The network strives to coordinate and support national and international anti-racism strategies.

The Network launched its first Anti-Racism Week in South Africa in March 2016, and successfully involved more than 80 organisations to learn and talk about, and speak and act against racism.

Youth Development

Kathy has always had a passion for youth development and this work has found an important place in the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation. "I am especially proud that we have started to work with young people to ensure that they knew where we came from and to work hard at making sure that they make the contribution to the development of SA. This is after all what we have come to expect from all generations of young people over the ages. They must be our change agents to a truly non-racial, democratic South Africa," said Kathy.



Ismail Vadi, Fadwa Barghouti and Kathy

Internationalism



Fidel Castro and Kathy

Throughout his life, Kathy has been a committed internationalist, meaning cooperation and solidarity with people across the world, especially those under the yoke of oppression. Addressing the United Nations on non-racism on 21 March 2014, Kathy said: "I challenge leaders gathered here today, to take up the reins and actively move towards building a truly non-racial world, free of discrimination and look towards creating a worldwide network or forum to begin a global campaign to combat racism in all its forms".

Kathy acknowledged the leading role played by India in isolating apartheid South Africa. In his November 2014 statement marking the 125th anniversary of the birth of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, Kathy said: "A general ban on trade between India and South Africa was in place since 1946. No vessel with a South African flag was allowed at Indian seaports and Indian ships were not allowed to call on South African ports. It was only in the 1980s that the rest of the world started to follow the lead of India and the isolation of South Africa from all facets of global life took hold. The steadfastness of Nehru and the All-India Congress leaders served as beacons for the international anti-apartheid movement."



Yasser Arafat and Kathy

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Kathy maintained a strong sense of solidarity with oppressed people in other parts of the world. He has supported the Sahrawi people in their quest for independence from Morocco as well as support for the opposition in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. He was especially concerned about the people of Palestine who have faced dispossession and occupation since the 1940s by a Zionist Israel.

“We once again wish to assure the people of Palestine of our support and solidarity in your struggle for dignity, freedom and statehood. In our short stay here we have seen and heard enough to conclude that apartheid has been reborn here. In its reborn form it is however worse than its predecessor. Even during the worst days of apartheid we did not have walls to divide and control people, we also did not have separate roads for separate races, and we did not have the system of checkpoints that exist here.” Address to a conference in Palestine on 27 April 2013

Kathy was the secretary of the original Free Mandela Committee in 1962 that later sparked a powerful global campaign for the Release of Nelson Mandela and all Political Prisoners in the 1980s. Inspired by this idea, Kathy suggested the idea of initiating an international campaign to Free Marwan Barghout and all Palestinian Political Prisoners that was later launched on Robben Island.



Speaking Out

After he stepped down from his roles in the ANC and government, Kathy had been consistent in not commenting publicly on contemporary politics in South Africa. However, he observed the influence of the Gupta family on the President, the use of public funds for Nkandla and the firing of Finance Minister Nene. There were also attacks on the judiciary and on the Public Protector, when they were critical of government.

When the Constitutional Court ruled on 31 March 2016 that President Jacob Zuma had contravened the Constitution, Kathy decided to write a letter him. He said that he was “breaking with tradition” and expressed his disquiet that the President had “failed to uphold, defend and respect the Constitution as the supreme law”. Kathy called upon the President to resign.

Passing On

At the beginning of March 2017, Kathy was admitted to hospital for dehydration. A scan revealed bleeding in the brain that required urgent surgery. After the operation, his recovery was compromised by a number of complications and he eventually succumbed on 28 March at 3:45. At the age of 87, Ahmed Kathrada, the third surviving Rivonia trialist was no more.

In accordance with his wishes that he should be buried in line with Islamic rites, Kathy’s funeral was held the next day at Westpark Cemetery. It was attended by well over three thousand people, from all walks of life. It commenced with Muslim,



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Christian, Hindu and Jewish prayers. It was addressed by his close friend, Laloo Isu Chiba; Sophie Williams-de Bruyn, an old comrade; his nephew Nazir Kathrada on behalf of the family; and speakers from the ANC, COSATU and SACP. The eulogy was delivered by former president Kgalema Motlanthe.

Speakers at the funeral made powerful statements that the values that Kathy stood for were being trampled upon; that people who were speaking out need to be defended; and those abusing power must resign.



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Awards and Recognition



February 1986	Honorary Degree	Central London Polytechnic
February 1986	Honorary Degree	University of Guelph, Canada
1988 (conferred but only given in 1992)	Isithwalandwe	African National Congress
1991	Fellow of the Mayibuye Centre	University of the Western Cape
June 1999	Order for Meritorious Service Class 1	Gold President of the Republic of South Africa
May 2000	Honorary Doctorate	University of Massachusetts
2002	Honorary Doctorate	University of Durban-Westville
October 2003	Mahatma Gandhi Award	Congress of Business and Economics
January 2004	Doctorate of Humane Letters	University of Missouri
2004	Voted 46th	Top 100 Great South Africans
January 2005	Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award	President of India
December 2005	Doctor of Humanities	Michigan State University
October 2009	Recognition Award Of His Sacrifices And Outstanding Contribution To Democracy, Constitutionalism And Human Rights In South Africa	Constitutional Hill Trust
April 2011	Honorary Degree	University of Kentucky
April 2011	Award	Kentucky State
May 2011	Honorary Doctorate	University of Kentucky
August 2012	Freeman of the City	City of Johannesburg
March 2012	Centenary Distinguished Leadership	ANC Rivonia "Heroes" branch
December 2012	Honorary Doctorate	University of the Witwatersrand
April 2014	Lifetime Achievement Award	Oliver Transformation and Empowerment Awards
April 2014	Founders Award	Asian Awards
June 2015	Doctor of Law -	University of Cape Town
Bastille Day 2015	Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur	Government of France
November 2015	Freedom of the City	City of Cape Town
January 2016	Freeman of London City of London	City of London
January 2016	Freedom of Sedibeng Sedibeng District Municipality	Sedibeng District Municipality
April 2016	Honorary Doctorate Durban University of Technology	Durban University of Technology
May 2016	Desmond Tutu Social Justice Award South Africa Partners (Boston USA)	South Africa Partners (Boston USA)
October 2016	Ad Portas' most prestigious award honouring South African heroes Michaelhouse	Michaelhouse

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Mr Neeshan Balton

Tribute to Comrade Kathy

In January 2010, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation appointed me to serve as its Executive Director, bringing me into closer contact with Kathy and giving me the privilege of implementing his vision.

Devising a programme to capture the essence of a humble, steadfast, moral, principled and dedicated activist of 75 years would not prove easy. With the guidance of the Board of the Foundation and generous financial contributors, the Foundation was able to roll out its programmes and activities.

Its scope of work has expanded significantly since and it has an established research programme, historical archives as well as a major focus on youth. Likewise Kathy's vision for a 'Greenpeace-like movement against racism' is being realised through the launch of the Anti-Racism Network of South Africa, for which the Foundation together with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, serve as the secretariat.

Over the years, I have accompanied Kathy on many of his more than 200 annual public engagements which he undertook with great enthusiasm. He interacted with hundreds of people, from pop stars to presidents, with the same humility and dignity. He however, was in his element surrounded by ordinary young people, when he interacted with learners and students. He relished his role as the 'mayor' of Robben Island and provided countless tours.

After his release Kathy reacquainted himself with his family and its new generation. Robbed by imprisonment of the possibility of marriage and family life, Kathy relished the antics of his young nieces and nephews. At his insistence, regular family reunions were initiated, which helped to maintain his strong links with all the family scattered across the country.

He also reunited with his other comrades-in-arms, most notably with Laloo Isu Chiba. Bereft upon the death of Madiba, Isu and Kathy grew even closer resembling quarrelling, inseparable siblings; united in their shared history, experiences and visions for the future.

Such constant contact gave me an intimate, privileged insight into his life and thoughts. My own sense of loss must pale that felt by his companion, comrade and wife Barbara.

As Kathy said at Madiba's funeral: "It is up to the present and next generations to take up the cudgels where you have left off. It is up to them, through service to deepen our democracy; entrench and defend our Constitution; eradicate poverty; eliminate inequality; fight corruption, and serve always with compassion, respect, integrity and tolerance. Above all, they must build our nation and break down the barriers that still divide us."

This, comrade, we pledge to do.

Hamba Kahle Comrade!

Neeshan Balton

Executive Director: Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

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National Archives of South Africa/Nelson Mandela Foundation

The Indicator Newspaper



AhmedKathrada
F o u n d a t i o n

Deepening Non-Racialism

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