

# Laloo 'Isu' Chiba

(1930 – 2017)

Principled Activist,  
Humble Revolutionary and Selfless Leader



AhmedKathrada  
Foundation  
Deepening Non-Racialism

Photo: Yunus Chamda

# Lives of Courage Project



*Isu and fellow activists in Lenasia marking Isu's 82nd birthday. The event, which included a reflective session on his life, was hosted by the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation.  
Photo: Yunus Chamda*

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# Foreword by Derek Hanekom

Laloo Chiba, fondly known as 'Isu', has been described as 'the activists' activist'.

The thousands who attended his funeral on 9th December 2017 at the Nirvana Secondary School Hall in Lenasia would attest to it. Chiba would have influenced many of them, guiding their political thinking, either directly through personal interaction, or indirectly, being the anti-apartheid icon that he was.

His funeral ceremony possessed a 'genuineness' and intimacy that is rarely found at such events, which tend to be officious and 'cold'. As his bier left the hall, I was reminded of Jan Celliers' words, "*Stil, broers, daar gaan n man verby... Daar's nog maar een soos hy; kyk hom goed.*" In English, it means, "Be still, brothers, there goes a man by... There is just one like him; have a good look at him."

The many whom he would have interacted with on a day to day basis will remember him for his grassroots approach to activism. Isu believed firmly in leading by example and never shied away from hard work.

During his term in detention in the late 1980s, despite his age, he joined younger political prisoners on a 10-day hunger strike.

Many years later, he convinced his doctor to allow him to conduct a 24-hour hunger strike in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners. This is after he had to be emphatically told, that he could not do a three-day hunger strike!

The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation youth often talk about Isu's commitment to the annual Operation Winter Warm campaign. Not only did he encourage others to participate, but made sure he carried the heavy plastic bags of clothing and other items collected for the underprivileged himself; loading the Gift of the Givers' truck for distribution.



*Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Chairperson,  
Derek Hanekom, with Laloo 'Isu' Chiba*

As much as Isu was loved by young activists, his strict sense of discipline often contrasted with the free-spirited attitude usually associated with youth.

During his term in detention, young activists would complain about how Chiba woke up at 5am to exercise; how he chastised them for sleeping, and made them wash prison blankets. More recently at the Foundation, he was adamant that the youth department enlist hundreds of participants for its projects, mapping a strategy to do so.

Despite being, dare I say, a stubborn character of sorts, Isu was always willing to have his views challenged and was never afraid to change them if he was convinced otherwise.

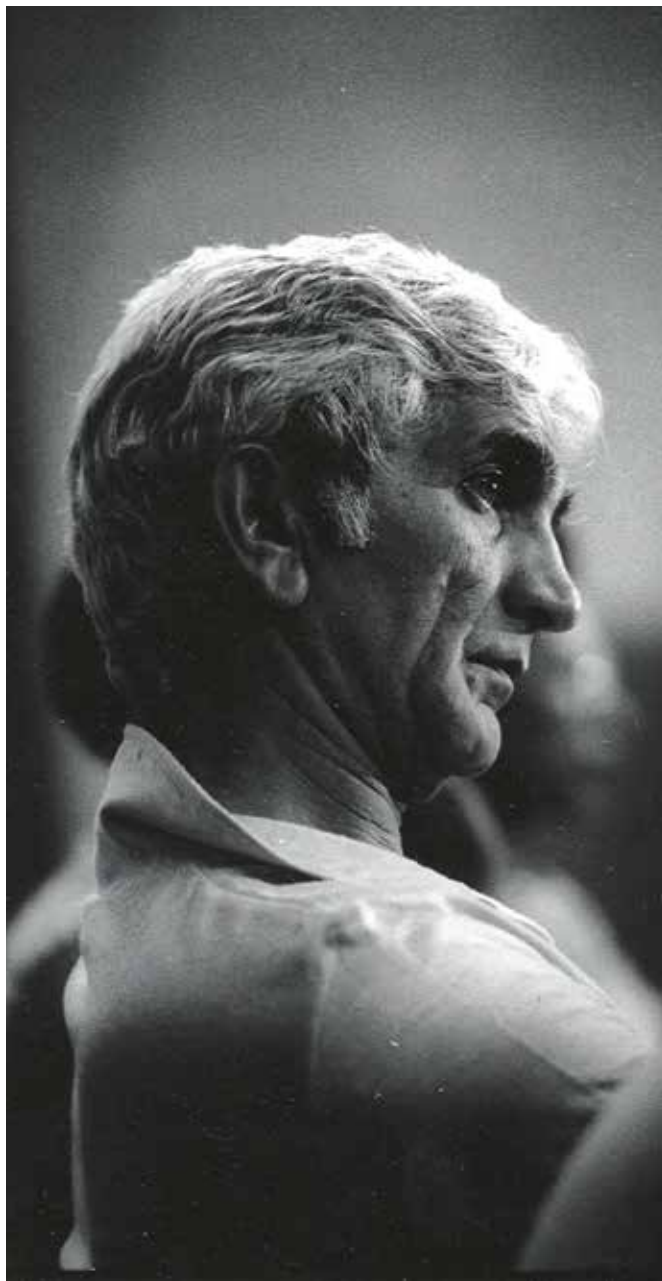
He was loved as much for his military-like discipline, as he was for the care and interest he took in every individual he came across.

At the time of writing this foreword, the Foundation's Board had not yet met since Isu's passing. When we do, it's bound to be a difficult moment. Earlier last year, Board members broke down at the first formal meeting after Ahmed Kathrada's passing. This time round, the grief will be doubled.

We're going to miss Isu. The staff at the Foundation, will miss him equally, if not more. He was a daily presence at the office, and was considered an 'honourary staff member'.

As time goes by though, and we page through the chapters of his life, we have no doubt that his legacy will continue inspiring us, and the generations that succeed us.

It is our hope that by producing this booklet, highlighting his contribution to our struggle for freedom, we do justice to capturing the life of the 'activists' activist'.



*Laloo 'Isu' Chiba*

## Introduction

Laloo 'Isu' Chiba's involvement in the struggle for national liberation in South Africa spans almost 60 years. During this period he was active in the South African Communist Party (SACP), the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), the United Democratic Front (UDF), the African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

Isu stands tall as one of the most senior leaders of the broader Congress movement, having served on the 2nd National High Command of MK, after the arrest in 1964 of MK's Commander-in-Chief, Nelson Mandela and other high ranking ANC officials such as Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and Govan Mbeki, among others.

He was elected as a Member of Parliament in the first national democratic elections held on 27 April 1994. He was returned to office as a public representative in 1999 and formally retired from parliamentary politics in 2004.

He is a founder member of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, established to promote the principle of non-racialism and constitutionalism in South Africa.

In the 1950s, Isu was a young man working to stabilise his family life. In the next decade he emerged as a disciplined and courageous freedom fighter, an MK combatant, who was arrested and sentenced to 18 years in prison on Robben Island, which he served with Mandela, Sisulu and Kathrada.

After his release from prison, he was deeply involved in the TIC and UDF, for which he was detained in 1985 without trial. After his retirement he remained a fatherly figure, confidante and elder statesman to political activists in the liberation movement. He passed away after a short illness on Friday, 8 December 2017.

## Early Life



*A young Isu (right) with his brother-in-law, Jeram 'Jerry' Valla. Photo: Chiba family album*

## LALOO 'Isu' CHIBA - Principled Activist, Humble Revolutionary and Selfless Leader

Laloo Ishwarlal Chiba was born to Dahi Nana and Chiba Mavjee in Fordsburg, Johannesburg on 5 November 1930. Theirs had been a child marriage as had been the tradition among Hindu families in the early 20th century. According to family custom, Laloo assumed his Dad's first name of "Chiba" as his surname. But "Ishwarlal" proved rather difficult to pronounce, so his middle name was shortened to 'Isu' by members of his family.

His paternal and maternal grandfathers had immigrated to South Africa in 1897. His forebears came from villages in the district of Navsari, state of Gujarat, India. His parents, who were born in India, settled permanently in South Africa in July 1930, and lived on Mint Road, in the Johannesburg suburb of Fordsburg.

The 5th November is known as "Guy Fawkes' Day". Guy Fawkes belonged to a group of provincial English Catholics who planned to blow up the House of Lords on 5 November 1605. Guy Fawkes became synonymous with the Gunpowder Plot, which has been commemorated in England since that time.

Isu's involvement with dynamite as part of the armed struggle in South Africa is resonant with the conspirators of the Gunpowder Plot. He often joked that he was born on Guy Fawkes' Day and therefore ended up in Robben Island Prison.

Isu lived in a multi-racial milieu with a few Indian families, two Chinese families, a Lebanese family, and white families who lived in Octavia Hill Flats. All these families had resided there long before the advent of the Group Areas Act in 1950. Isu recollected:

*" We shared a common back yard and a single toilet with our immediate neighbours who lived on either side of our home. They numbered between eighteen and twenty people and we often invited one another to our homes on festive and other*

*important occasions for meals and treats. There was a strong sense of communal solidarity amongst us. One neighbour had a fridge, which was used by anyone who needed it. My family had a phone and all our neighbours used it."*

This small community in a little corner of Fordsburg went on to produce a prominent business person, five medical doctors, two dentists, two volunteers who courted imprisonment during the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign, an amateur boxer, one school principal, an aeronautical engineer (Isu's brother, Govind 'Chips' Chiba), who made an important political contribution to the ANC in exile, and a political activist who spent eighteen years on Robben Island, namely, Isu.



*Isu's father, Chiba Mavjee, and his stepmother, Luxmi, with his sister, Nimita. Photo: Chiba family album*

# Schooling

Isu attended the Bree Street Primary School in Newtown at the age of seven, and later enrolled at the Johannesburg Indian High School. Among his teachers was Mervy Thandray, who a few years later became a prominent leader of the TIC; PS Joshi, who published a seminal book on Indian South Africans entitled, *The Tyranny of Colour*; and Dolly Ayer - the only Indian female teacher at the school and the sister of a fellow MK operative, Paul Joseph.

At school he joined the debating society and participated in the tennis and table tennis teams. During the afternoons, he and his siblings attended Gujarati School at the Gandhi Hall in Johannesburg. From early on in life, Isu was meticulous, almost

to the point of perfection. He said:

*"It has been said of me that I am meticulous to the point where it has become something of joke. I don't know how it actually started. It's always been there, though, and I'm unable to trace its exact origins. I strongly suspect that it stems from my Dad, who was not only a disciplinarian, but was also very meticulous in almost everything that he did. He insisted on us doing things correctly, on being honest; on being religious; he insisted on paying on time; and praying on time twice daily. And he never deviated from doing certain things – such as never shaving on Wednesdays; and fasting every Saturday without fail."*



An old photo of the Chiba family featured in 'The Star' newspaper along with an article by journalist, Janet Smith. Isu is seen on the far left.

## Youthful Antics



*Isu, sporting a leather jacket, with a family friend, Dajee Pema. Photo: Chiba family album*



Isu and his parents were not politically active. His Dad subscribed to *The Indian Opinion*, which kept him informed about the affairs of the Indian community in general. However, he took a keen interest in the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946 led by the TIC under the leadership of Dr Yusuf Dadoo. But Isu was disinterested in politics and education in his youth. For a while he got sucked into the company of Forsdberg's more notorious and sleazy characters. He reminisced:

*"We spent our time at pool rooms – the one situated in the basement of the Mangalum Building, where there was an ex-soldiers' club opposite the Majestic Cinema; and the other was located in Azad Café in Kort Street. There was always a mixed crowd of Coloureds, Indians and Malays. There was a lively atmosphere there, with the mixed crowd of men and women dancing, talking, joking, laughing, and generally having a time of their lives. It is in this process that I started keeping company with undesirable elements - ruffians, dagga-smokers and gangsters.*

*The gangster in question was none other than the well-known Sharif Khan. He was neither a drinker nor a smoker and took great pride in the fancy black Buick which he owned. He always dressed well and his dark and handsome face always sported a friendly smile. He wore a hat, which was the fashion in those early days, and that added to his already-dignified appearance. I suppose that only those who had dealings with him knew what really lay beneath that cool, calm and collected exterior."*

Bad news travels with the speed of lightning. When his Dad heard of Isu's errant ways, he was furious. After a weekend spree, Isu was told that he was no longer welcome in the family home.

*"He said this very calmly, without even raising his voice, but I knew that beneath that calmness, he was furious with me. I got a shock of my life and I was stunned into silence. I knew that he*

*was angry, and I knew why. However, it was the last thing that I had expected from him. My belongings had already been packed by my Dad. I didn't argue with him because I was afraid that he would've exploded had I done so. I left home confused and shattered. That night I stood all alone, bag in hand, on the corner of Crown and Pioneer Roads."*

Meanwhile his employers also had come to learn about his association with a gangster of note, and they served him with a month's notice of termination of employment. Within a month, Isu had been rendered homeless and jobless.

With a dim prospect in life, Isu left for India in mid-1951 on the ship, SS Karanja, on a 21-day journey across the wide expanse of the Indian Ocean to the land of his forefathers, where, unknown to him at the time, the first major turning point in his life was in store for him.



*Isu in later years with his father, Chiba Mavjee.*

*Photo: Chiba family album*

# New Beginnings



*Isu and his wife Luxmi with their daughters, Yasvanti, Kaylash and Gita. Isu had his head bandaged as he was wounded a few days earlier in a fight, the details of which are unknown. Photo: Chiba family album*

Isu was overwhelmed by the chaotic sights that he saw in India. Never before had he witnessed such poverty and squalor, especially of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised people of Mumbai, who were living on the pavements. He was told that pavement-dwellers had no homes; had nowhere else to go; had migrated to the cities from the rural areas in their quest to improve their economic circumstances, and that their entire lives were spent living on the pavements of the city, raising their families and eking out an existence in the process.

Isu's ancestral village of Rupantalav is situated near Navsari. Village life has a dull rhythm of its own. Everyone worked on the farms seven days a week, and there was no difference between weekdays and weekends. Within a year, Isu was introduced to Luxmi Bhika, who lived in the village of Bodali. He met her at a well in his grandfather's fruit orchard and instinctively knew that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. They were married on 5 May 1952 in a traditional Hindu ceremony, and returned to South Africa shortly thereafter.

Isu got a job at Phillips' Dairy in Mayfair West and was soon promoted as a foreman. He worked there for nine years until his first arrest on 17 April 1963 for his political activities. Among his duties was collecting rent from tenants on behalf of his boss who owned rental apartments on top of the dairy. One of the tenants was Major Britz from the Railway Police, who was totally taken aback when he arrested Isu a few years later. He didn't have the faintest idea that this amiable and jovial dispatch clerk and rent collector was nothing else but what he normally described as a 'terrorist'.



*Isu carrying Kaylash is seen with Luxmi, his sister, Jashoo, and brother-in-law, Govind, and their children.*

*Photo: Chiba family album*

# Political Awakening



*Chiba Mavjee, Isu, Luxmi and political activist, Paul Joseph.  
Photo: Chiba family album*

Isu's brothers, Raman and Govind had developed strong bonds of friendship with the politically conscious Vassens, Naidoos and Vanias in the neighbourhood. Among them also was Ahmed 'Kathy' Kathrada, a leading activist in the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress (TIYC). Isu regularly visited Kathy at Flat 13, Kholvad House in central Johannesburg.

Here he came into contact with a wider circle of TIYC activists such as Herbie Pillay, Paul Joseph, Reggie Vandeyar, Essop and Abdulhay Jassat and Harry Naidoo. He became conscious of political events linked to 1952 Defiance Campaign, which had led to the dramatic increase of the membership of the ANC; the formation in 1953 of the Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured People's Organisation; the formation a year later of the Federation of South African Women, and then the launch of the South African Congress of Trade Unions in 1955. The close co-operation of these organisations in joint struggles against racial discrimination paved the way for the highly successful campaign for the Congress of the People, where the Freedom Charter was adopted in June 1955 in Kliptown. Kathy's central involvement in these activities made a favourable impression on Isu, but he remained politically inactive.

However, the dramatic resistance activities did not escape the attention of the racist apartheid state, which became alarmed at the more united and co-ordinated manner in which the struggle against apartheid was unfolding. In addition to imposing bans and restrictions on the leadership of these various anti-apartheid organisations, the racist National Party government reacted with a heavy hand. In dawn raids across the country on 5 December 1956, the security forces arrested 156 leaders of the liberation movement, including Kathy, and charged them with high treason. The ensuing Treason Trial lasted for over four years. Kathy's arrest proved to be a turning point in Isu's political development. He explained:



*A studio photo of Isu. Photo: Chiba family album*

*"That event jolted me out of my political slumber and set me thinking seriously about my own political involvement which, apart from the passive support for the Congress Movement and of its policies, had been zilch at the time. I was overtaken by a sense of guilt, and although I am not one for making annual resolutions, I took a hushed oath on Kathy's arrest to make some contribution, however small, to the struggle for liberation of the country. I did so in the latter half of 1950s in the Congress Movement in general, and with the Transvaal Indian Congress in particular. Among them was the successful boycott of products manufactured by businesses owned by prominent National Party members and supporters of the government, for example, the boycott of Rembrandt cigarettes. The mood of protest and demonstration among the people had heightened in this period and when the ANC hosted its annual Congress in Durban in December 1959, it unanimously voted to initiate a countrywide anti-pass campaign beginning on 31 March 1960, and climaxing on 26 June with a bonfire of passes."*

In his *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela says that the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) had been invited to join the campaign but instead of linking arms with the ANC, it sought to sabotage the ANC by announcing that it was launching its own anti-pass campaign on 21 March 1960. Several thousand demonstrators gathered at the Sharpeville police station on that fateful day, when police opened fire killing 69 demonstrators. This led to the banning of the ANC and the PAC on 7 April and the declaration of a State of Emergency.

These developments had a profound impact on Isu, which he explained as follows:

*"The early 1960s had turned out to be rather dramatic in my life. In the context of an extremely repressive climate, coupled with a rapidly changing and intense political environment, I was first recruited into the underground structures of the SACP in 1960; then into one of its sabotage units, and in late 1961, I joined Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Spear of the Nation.*

*Reggie Vandeyar had been monitoring my conduct and political activities. One day, in quite a nonchalant manner, he informed me that he had*

*been observing me for some time; that I was probably aware that there was an SACP which was underground because it had been banned; and that the Party would like me to join it. I immediately replied that it would be an honour for me to be a member of the Party. It had been as simple as that, and I was then placed in Reggie's cell."*

During the State of Emergency more than 18 000 people had been arrested and detained throughout South Africa. Among them in Johannesburg were Molvi Cachalia, his brother Yusuf Cachalia, Joe Slovo, Paul Joseph and Herbie Pillay. Mandela, Sisulu, Kathy, Chief Luthuli, Nana Sita and other Treason Trialists were detained at the Pretoria Local Prison. Isu was drafted into the detainees' support network during the Emergency. He used his Volkswagen to ferry the relatives of the detainees for visits to prisons.



**Herbie Pillay, Tommy Vassen and Abdulhay Jassat with Isu.**

*Photo: Images of ANC Politics in Lenasia*

# Armed Struggle



*Isu in 2017 at the gravesite of young MK martyr, Ashley Kriel, in Cape Town.*

*Photo: Zaakirah Vadi*

Isu believed that it is justifiable for an organisation to consider armed struggle against an oppressive regime once it had been barred from pursuing that struggle through peaceful means. The SACP took a formal decision to embark on armed struggle well before the ANC. Based on the deep sense of commitment to the new cause that he had undertaken, Isu was drafted into a sabotage unit of the SACP under the leadership of Wolfie Kodesh. The other unit members were Paul Joseph and Reggie Vandeyar. They were involved in disrupting power supplies and telecommunication lines.

In a parallel process the ANC itself had been giving the matter of armed resistance against the apartheid state serious consideration. Its adoption of the armed struggle had been spearheaded by Mandela himself. The first public indication of this new method of struggle became apparent during the 3-day stay-at-home in May 1961, when in a secret interview with an ITN journalist, Brian Widlake, Mandela intimated that new forms of struggle, including violent struggle, had to be contemplated under new conditions of extreme repression by the apartheid state.

Militarily, Wolfie was the most experienced member of Isu's unit. During the Second World War, he had fought in North Africa as he was totally opposed to fascism. Isu received his early military training from Wolfie. He explained:

*"When our unit was incorporated into MK, Wolfie instructed us on the standing rules of MK, emphasising the cardinal rule of no loss of life; the absolute necessity of security and discipline; the selection of targets, and the reasons for their selection; information regarding the manufacture of explosives; the acquisition and stockpiling of the required ingredients, and the historical significance of the date of the launch. Wolfie was at pains to point out that MK had thrown open its doors for membership to all racial groups – only the second organisation in the history of the liberation movement in South Africa to*

*have done so after the SACP. He emphasised that our targets should be symbols of apartheid such as the courts, the pass offices and Whites-only sections of public buildings. Then there was economic infrastructure such as power pylons, electrical sub-stations, railways lines and telecommunications. Our first three targets on 16 December 1961, when MK was launched publicly, were the Whites-only section of the post office in Fordsburg; the Bantu Commissioner's Court in Malherbe Street in Newtown, and the Bezuidenhout Street Pass Offices in Johannesburg. We were overjoyed by the success of our first mission."*

The Indian community within which Isu resided received the news of these armed attacks with mixed feelings. A good number being strong adherents of Gandhi's philosophy of passive resistance and non-violence were opposed to the switch to armed struggle. However, those who were in favour of a more militant approach and who had felt that the liberation movement's method of non-violent struggle had borne little fruit welcomed the shift in strategy.

Over time Isu and his fellow combatants recruited more members for MK, primarily from Fordsburg, Vrededorp, Johannesburg, Ferreirstown and Doornfontein. Among them were Abdulhay Jassat, Indres Naidoo, Shirish Nanabhai, Yusuf Asvat, Narendra 'Nanoo' Jasmath, Solly Vania, Faker Salie, Tommy and Bobby Vassen, Kista Moonsamy, Moosa Moosajee, Ahmed Bhabha, Salim Mayet, Magan Narsi Chhiba, Omar Bhamjee, Joe Cajee and Amien Cajee.

In 1962, Wolfie informed Isu that he, Wolfie, was being redeployed to duties elsewhere, and consequently, would no longer be part of the unit in Indian areas. Isu was told to take over from him and held the position of platoon commander until his first arrest in April 1963. His contact on the Johannesburg Regional Command was Jack Hodgson. Being a "Desert Rat" during the Second World War and former Secretary of the





*Isu and his fellow MK operatives, Shirish Nanabhai and Reggie Vandeyar, in Lenasia. Photo: Mems Moosa*

banned Congress of Democrats, he was the first South African to have been placed under 24-hour house arrest in November 1962 under the Sabotage Act.

On 10 July 1962, Isu visited the Soviet Union accompanied by John Matthews. Kathy had been instrumental in arranging that trip largely as a holiday for the two. Isu went on to Leningrad and then proceeded to Yalta - a seaside resort on the Black Sea. In Moscow he met Dr Yusuf Dadoo, who had gone into exile on instructions of the liberation movement two

years earlier. He eagerly inquired about the political situation back home. Isu reported on the activities of the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses as well as on MK operations.

The next year turned out to be a decisive year in the apartheid regime's drive to crush the incipient armed struggle. The most severe blow to the underground movement had been the arrest of the MK leadership in Rivonia in July 1963. A little later, MK cadres in Natal had also been arrested, among whom were several members of the Natal Regional Command.

It was in the midst of the massive clampdown by the apartheid state that Isu had been arrested in the early hours of 17 April 1963. Reggie, Indres and Shirish were caught red-handed trying to blow up a signal relay box at the Riverlea railway station, after their unit was infiltrated by an apartheid spy. At about 3 o'clock of that fateful morning, members of the Special Branch and the Railway Police raided Isu's house and conducted a thorough search of the entire premises. Isu explained the raid:

*"Present were Lieutenant Van Wyk and Major Britz, whom I had known for the past three years, and from whom I had been collecting rent on behalf of my employer. The loud knock on the door had woken up all the members of my family. They were shocked when they saw half a dozen white males barging into the house, going from room to room, and turning things upside down while conducting the search. Apart from allowing me to tell my Dad to inform my employer that I would not be reporting to work that day, I was not allowed to speak to anybody or to bid them goodbye. After confiscating my passport, identity card, a diary and some documents, they arrested me and detained me at the Marshall Square Police Station at about 4:30am. Abdulhay Jassat had also been arrested a little later at his home and was detained with us. We were held incommunicado – with no access to anybody for the next 48 hours."*

# Torture



*A photo of Isu in later years looking out from a cell into Robben Island's courtyard. Photo: Yunus Chamda*

Those arrested with Isu were severely tortured. Isu was stunned at the appearance of his comrades after their interrogation. He described their condition as follows:

*"I was shocked at the state in which Reggie, Indres and Shirish were after their initial interrogation. It was evident that they had been badly assaulted and tortured. None of them had received any medical attention, except for Indres. He had already been shot in his shoulder at the site of the act of sabotage, but fortunately, the bullet had been removed later at the Coronation hospital. Shirish was in severe pain as he was severely beaten. At the Langlaagte Police Station a wet sack had been tied around his head and twisted until he was choking. Reggie was in extreme pain. His face had been badly bruised and his shoulder damaged. Several of his ribs were smashed in by 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel, who was well-known to us for his extreme brutality. The very mention of his name drove fear into the activists."*

Reflecting on his own painful interrogation, Isu recalled:

*"When I entered the interrogation room, a dozen white men from the Special Branch and the Railway Police surrounded me. Major Britz was there seated at a desk. Having already witnessed the state in which Reggie had been, I realised that they were there for the sole purpose of smashing me up in order to obtain information on MK operations. I was assaulted with blows to my head and body, and they kicked me as I fell. The brutish cops had formed an arc, and with a blow from*

*one of them, I ended up where another was standing, and he repeated the performance. In the process my face had been badly bruised, and my left ear was bleeding as my eardrum had been perforated. They wanted to know the name of my contact in MK. They were determined to discover the next link in the chain of command. I simply pleaded ignorance. I told them that I didn't know; and that they must have made a serious mistake in believing that I had known something.*

*However, what followed was far more serious than the assault phase. Someone from behind threw a wet hessian sack over my body, constricting the movement of both my hands, and half my body was covered. 'Straight-jacketed' would be an appropriate description of the situation. I was then flung onto the floor. My shoes and socks were removed, and I could feel someone tying wires to my toes, fingers and knuckles. Suddenly I felt violent electric shocks passing through my*

*body. I couldn't help screaming and struggled in vain to free myself. They kept on hammering me about who my 'contact person' was. I continued to plead ignorance, and whenever I did so, violent electric shocks again passed through my body. I realised that some sort of handle was being turned, and that the wires were electrodes. They then poured water over my feet and hands, and turned the handle more speedily, thereby dramatically increasing the intensity of the electric shocks since water is a good conductor of electricity. All that I could do was to scream out in pain and plead ignorance - over and over again. Froth was dripping from my mouth. I was completely exhausted. I was unable to get up and walk after*



**Gauteng Human Settlements MEC Paul Mashatile, and anti-apartheid veterans Reggie Vandeyar, Shirish Nanabhai, Isu and Ahmed Kathrada present then President Kgalema Motlanthe with a frame on behalf of the ANC Lenasia branch. Photo: Yunus Chamda**

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*the sack had been removed. I collapsed. They carried me down three flights of stairs and bundled me into the car with Reggie, Indres, Shirish and Abdulhay. They took us back to Marshall Square. Since my cell was on the upper floor, they carried me once again up another flight of stairs and dumped me into my cell like a sack of potatoes. Both brain and body had been badly numbed. I dozed off in fits and starts. It was a long while before I could gather my thoughts that night and go through the day's horrifying details. I was angry about what had happened to my comrades and to me. I was overcome by conflicting emotions - of pride on the one hand because I had not broken, and had not disclosed any information to my interrogators; but also of shame on the other hand because I had cried out in pain in the presence of my torturers."*

Isu rarely spoke about his torture. In fact, the first time that

his closest comrades, including Kathy, heard about it was at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) some three decades after his interrogation. At the TRC, Chiba also spoke about how it 'haunted' him that he had screamed during his torture, something that he felt deeply ashamed about. He said:

*"I had screamed out in pain, I had pleaded for mercy from an enemy, a people's enemy, I had asked them to stop torturing me. I had given them the pleasure of listening to my screams and it is something that haunts me up till today. As I repeat here, I feel a deep sense of shame for the shortcoming. I don't think that a revolutionary should actually give the enemy the pleasure of listening to one's screams. I think I failed in that respect. I hope that you people understand that. It haunts me up until today and I don't think that I can ever come to terms with that."*



*Isu greeting fellow anti-apartheid activist, Mohamed Timol, at the 2017 Ahmed Timol inquest. The inquest, which was instituted by Timol's nephew Imtiaz, found that Ahmed Timol was killed by apartheid police in detention. Isu was amongst several others who gave evidence of his own torture at the hands of the apartheid police. Photo: Yunus Chamda*

## Trial and Rivonia Arrests



*Taken on 7 June 2007 at Nelson Mandela's house, Isu is seen with fellow Robben Island prisoners: Michael Dingake, Kwedi Mkalipi, Eddie Daniels, Ahmed Kathrada, Billy Nair and Mandela. Photo: ©NMF - Benny Gool/Oryx Media*

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Isu and his fellow detainees appeared before Judge Bosman on 19 April 1963 in the packed Johannesburg Magistrate's Court. They were represented by Ramlal Bhoolia and Harold Wolpe. Isu and Abdulhay's trial was separated from that of Reggie, Indres and Shirish. The latter were remanded for summary trial in the Rand Supreme Court on 8 May 1963 on contravening the Sabotage Act. All three pleaded guilty to one count of contravening the Act and were sentenced to 10 years each with hard labour on Robben Island.

Isu and Abdulhay were delighted that the State eventually withdrew charges against them because of a lack of evidence. But their joy was short-lived when a Sergeant Dirker from the Special Branch slapped them with a 90-day detention order. Both were taken to Marshall Square Police Station, where they were locked in single cells to serve out the order in solitary confinement. Isu was eventually released on 7 August 1963.

Meanwhile the arrest and conviction of several MK cadres in Johannesburg in May 1963, was soon followed by political developments which impacted negatively on the Congress Movement.

Eighteen MK comrades in Natal were arrested and charged, among whom were members of the Durban Regional Command such as Curnick Ndlovu, Billy Nair and Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim. Likewise the Johannesburg Regional Command was shattered after its Rivonia hideout was raided on 11 July 1963. Those who were arrested were Walter Sisulu, Raymond Mhlaba, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi, Rusty Bernstein, Andrew Mlangeni and Denis Goldberg, and together with Nelson Mandela, who was already serving a five year sentence, were charged with sabotage and given life sentences in what became known as the Rivonia Trial. MK's National High Command had been smashed.



*Nelson Mandela and Ahmed Kathrada sharing a word with Isu.*



*A 2017 photograph of Isu with Rivonia Trial lawyer George Bizos and TIC President, Dr Essop Jassat. Photo: Zaakirah Vadi*

# The Second National High Command

With the National High Command in tatters, the political leadership had thrust the responsibility of reconstituting it on the shoulders of Wilton Mkwayi. In November 1963, Isu was invited by Wilton to serve on MK's 2nd National High Command, together with David Kitson and Lionel Gay. Once the Rivonia Trialists were sentenced, Isu and his fellow commanders carried out various acts of sabotage with pipe bombs on railway lines in Pimville, Nancefield, New Canada, Mlamlamkunzi, Phomolong and Mzimhlope, and on the Vrededorp Post Office. In mid-1964, the Congress Movement suffered yet another setback when Isu, Kitson and Gay were arrested. He was taken to the 7th floor of the Special Branch's headquarters at Gray's Building in Johannesburg. During his interrogation, Isu acknowledged his membership of the SACP and MK.



*Isu was a speaker at an event marking 100 years since the 1917 Russian Revolution, one of his last public engagements in 2017.*



*This photo was taken almost 30 years after Isu would have served on MK's second National High Command. Members of the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses met with ANC leaders in September 1990 to discuss the reshaping of the Congress organisations in the wake of the ANC's unbanning. Isu can be seen standing on the far right. Photo: Images of ANC Politics in Lenasia.*

# The Little Rivonia Trial

Date of discharge/Datum van ontslag	
Appeal noted/Appel aangetekend	
Alterations in sentence/Versanderings in teregning	
Checked by/Nagegaan deur	18-12-1964 4969/64 LEEUWIKOP 22/10/64
R.C.A./R.A.A. No. 410-10-64	Case/Beak No. 545-1-1
Police Station/Polisiekantoor	M. Bloem

**In the Supreme Court of South Africa.**  
**In die Hooggeregshof van Suid-Afrika.**  
(*Dikwatsford Local* DIVISION.  
-AFDELING.)

To the Sheriff of the Province of *Transvaal* as  
his lawful Deputy.      Aan die Balju van die Provinsie  
sy wettige Adjunk.

GREETING.      SALUUT.

WHEREAS at a Criminal Session of the Supreme Court of South Africa holden before me at *Johannesburg*  
on the *Eighteenth* day of *December* in the Year of our Lord *1964*  
Ongesessene Nienghonderd en *18ste* Desember 1964 the undersigned prisoner was duly convicted of the crime(s) undermentioned and was sentenced by the judgment of the said Court to undergo the punishment(s) affixed to his (her) name in such place as may be prescribed by lawful authority:

TEREN OF: one (1) to enter on in die naam van die Staat geneemde gevangene in 'n bewaaring te ontvang en te hou totdat by (sy) geneemde straf oorgaan het of ooreenkomstig die wet daarvan ontbêre word.

Prisoner's Name. Naam van Gevangene.	Sentence. Straf.
<i>LALOO CHIGA</i>	<i>Eighteen (18) years imprisonment.</i>
Age/Ouderdad: <i>34 years</i>	
Nationality/Nasionaliteit: <i>SA.</i>	
Race/Ras: <i>INDIAN</i>	
Sex/Geslag: <i>MALE</i>	
Classification of fine must be stated. Klassifikasie van boete moet aangegee word.	Of what Crime convicted. Aan watter misdad skuldig bevind.
	<i>Guilty of sabotage on all 11 counts as charged. Treated as one for purposes of sentence.</i>

FOR WHICH THIS SHALL BE YOUR WARRANT.  
WAARVOOR DIT U LAATREK IS.

Given under my hand, at *Johannesburg* this *18th* day of *December* 1964  
day of *December* 1964

Registrar.  
Griffier. *A. Schwan.*

*[Signature]*  
Presiding Judge.  
Voorsittende Regter.

Supreme Court document sentencing Isu to 18 years on Robben Island.



Isu, Wilton, David, Mac Maharaj and John Matthews were released from detention on 30 October 1964, and were immediately charged with two counts of sabotage in terms of the Sabotage Act; one count in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act; and one count of receiving and/or soliciting money for the purpose of conducting a campaign by unlawful means. The case was remanded to 6 November 1964, and was known as the "Little Rivonia Trial".

Isu and his comrades appeared in the Supreme Court (Witwatersrand Division) before Justice Boshoff and pleaded not guilty on all four counts. They were defended by Advocate George Bizos. By that time Lionel Gay had turned state witness. On 15 December, Justice Boshoff handed down his judgement with Wilton Mkwayi getting a life sentence, David Kitson 20 years, Isu 18 years, John Matthews 15 years and Mac Maharaj 12 years.

After the unbanning of the ANC, Gay met Isu and said that he had turned state witness in a moment of weakness and asked for his forgiveness. Isu said:

*"I had no hesitation whatsoever in forgiving him and told him what had happened was history. Let bygones be bygones. He was happy with what I said. We exchanged contact numbers but I had no reason to contact him. That was the first time I had seen him since our conviction and I was certain that it would be the last. In a strange way I felt sorry for him. Apart from what Walter (Sisulu) had said about him (Gay) being in his own prison, I wondered how he had managed to see through each day, conscious of the fact that he had bought his freedom at the expense of his former comrades. I felt that not only did he pay that price while we had been in prison, but that he would continue to pay a price long after we had been released. That indeed, was the supreme irony of his 'bought' freedom."*

Isu and his comrades were shipped off to Robben Island

where the next 18 years were to be spent. He recounted those lonely moments:

*"I lay awake that night, my third after we had been sentenced. I went over the events of the past two days. I tried to absorb what eighteen years meant in terms of time. Eighteen years. Those had covered my entire childhood and school career. By that time my youngest daughter, Yasvanti, would be a few months short of her 21st birthday. In all likelihood, the two elder ones – Kaylash and Gita – would be married and I'd probably be a granddad – which actually turned out to be the case by the time I had been released. When I got up the next morning I said to myself: three days of this life are done but some six thousand, nine hundred and some odd days yet to go."*



Isu and fellow 'Little Rivonia Trialist', Mac Maharaj.

Photo: Chiba family album

# Robben Island Prison



*Isu at the entrance to Robben Island prison in 2017. Photo Zaakirah Vadi*

Robben Island is visible from many vantage points on the Ridges of the Cape Peninsula. It is a tiny mass of land about eleven kilometres in circumference, situated in the Atlantic Ocean, and seven kilometres from Cape Town harbour. Although a speck on the Atlantic Ocean, it came to symbolise the severity of colonialism and of apartheid in South Africa. Isu said:

*"We landed on the Island on 5 January 1965, and made our way to the reception office where particulars of the names, addresses and contact numbers of our family members were recorded. I was allocated a prison number 8/65. This meant that I was the eighth prisoner to be admitted to Robben Island Prison during the year 1965. I was locked up in a single cell in the "A" section. I was extremely apprehensive and totally exhausted. I immediately fell asleep and only woke up the next morning. When I looked out of my cell I was greatly relieved to see Billy Nair. He was locked up in the cell directly opposite mine and was the first person whom I had seen on Robben Island. After some weeks, Mac and I were transferred to the "B" Section, where the Rivonia Trialists as well as those whom the authorities considered to be the leaders of their respective political organisations had been kept. I finally occupied cell number 25 from 3 September 1965 until I was transferred*

*to Victor Verster Prison in Paarl on 6 May 1982 – almost seventeen years in one cell measuring slightly over two meters each way. Mandela's cell was number 7, Kathy's was number 1, and Walter Sisulu's was number 19. My neighbour was Billy Nair; directly opposite me was Herman Toivo ya Toivo from SWAPO, and next to him was James April, who had fought the Rhodesian forces at Wankie."*

In 1976, Kathy suggested to Sisulu and Mandela that the latter should clandestinely write his autobiography, which should be smuggled out of prison and published on Madiba's 60th birthday in 1978. Apart from Mandela and Sisulu, Kathrada, Mac Maharaj and Isu were roped into the project. Mandela's manuscript was transcribed in tiny writing by Mac and Isu, and successfully smuggled out of prison on Mac's release. A similar project linked to a Sisulu biography was undertaken by Sisulu, Kathrada and Isu. Isu was finally released on 17 December 1982. He recalled that day:

*"My wife and Dad, together with my daughters and sons-in-law and other family members, were all there to meet me and to take me home – a home I had never known because during the course of my stay on Robben Island my folks had shifted to Lenasia."*



*Isu and fellow Foundation board member and former President of S.A., Kgalema Motlanthe, are seen with EFF leaders, Julius Malema and Floyd Shivambu, ahead of a trip to Robben Island. Kathrada's wish was to take opposition leaders for a tour of the Island, a wish which Isu fulfilled, taking both Malema, and later, DA leader Mmusi Maimane, for a tour. Photos: Yunus Chamda and Zaakirah Vadi*



Robben Islanders Ahmed Kathrada, Isu, Reggie Vandeyar, Henry Makgothi, Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim and Shirish Nanabhai. Photo: Images of ANC Politics in Lenasia



Isu and fellow Robben Island prisoner Theophilus Cholo, whom he visited several years ago at his home in Shoshanguve. Photo: Zaakirah Vadi



Isu in a Robben Island cell in later years with two of his daughters, Gita and Kaylash. Photo: Chiba family album



Isu in 2017 visited Rivonia Trialist Denis Goldberg at his home in Cape Town. Photo: Zaakirah Vadi

# Re-entry into Politics

## As free as a bird

### ROBBEN ISLAND MAN'S 18 'LOST YEARS'

THIS is the first "free" month that former Robben Island prisoner, Mr. Laloo Chiba has spent in 18 years.

And for Mr. Chiba it was a month of trying to adapt and catch up with the numerous personal and social changes that have taken place since he was jailed in 1964.

It was also a time when he tried to recapture the years he had lost with his family — and become acquainted with the important experiences and shared family happenings he had missed.

Mr. Chiba was released on December 17 last year. He had spent most of his 18-year sentence in the maximum security prison on Robben Island after being found guilty after a marathon sabotage trial at the Rand Supreme Court.

**Sunday Times Reporter**

"It is an exhilarating feeling to be free again. It is at times like this that one realises how a bird that is freed from a cage feels," an elated Mr. Chiba said this week.

"I am extremely happy to be able to bask in the sunshine of a happy family reunion, but, at the same time I feel very sad for so many of my friends who are still on Robben Island and other jails where political prisoners are kept," he said.

Mr. Chiba said his morale and spirits were kept high while he was in prison by the support of his loved ones.

"The support, solidarity and love that my wife, daughters and family lavished on me has been the one principle why I remained an unbroken man," Mr. Chiba, who looked remarkably fit and healthy said.

"It was through my own programme of exercises and yoga that I managed to keep fit," he added.

The Chiba's have three daughters: Kaylash, 28, Gita, 24, and Yasanti, 21. When Mr. Chiba was 18, his eldest daughter was only eight.

of the most important days of their lives.

But he will be present when his youngest daughter, Yasanti, gets married in May.

My wife and I spent 18 years apart, as parents of three little girls. Now that we are reunited, it is as proud grandparents of three little boys, including a set of twins. Only she and I and those placed in similar situations know of the missing intervening years.

I, for one, missed sharing the childhood lives of my three daughters and that has always saddened me, although I know they are independent-minded girls and have their own lives to lead. But I hope to share a part of their adult lives with them.

Mr. Chiba said he prayed for the release of fellow Robben Island prisoners Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and others.

I hope and pray the time will come when they, too, will be reunited with their families.

"They are the true leaders of our people.

I still continue to be



MR. Laloo Chiba — together with his family after 18 years on Robben Island.

lieve that this is an unjust society and my personal opinion is that such a just society and the problems of South Africa can be dealt with what is enshrined in the Freedom Charter. I hope that such a society is not long in the coming.

Mr. Chiba's wife, Mrs.

Luxmi Chiba, displayed her happiness at being reunited with her husband.

"I hope to have him with us for good," she said, "so that we can bridge the gap of the lost years, especially those years when he was needed most."

"Nevertheless, we managed to live through the 18 years in a dignified and courageous manner.

"I had to play the role of father and mother during those years — I had to wear the pants as well. Believe me, it was not easy, especially for a grass widow."

SUNDAY TIMES extra, JANUARY 16, 1982

'Sunday Times' article following Isu's release from prison.



*Helen Joseph and Isu at a meeting calling for the release of Ahmed Kathrada. Photo: Images of ANC Politics in Lenasia*



*Ahmed Kathrada's release was celebrated by thousands in Lenasia who gathered spontaneously near his family home. Isu, though not pictured here, was one of the first to meet Kathrada after his release. Photo: The Lenasia Indicator*

Shortly after his release from prison, Isu became fully active in the reconstituted Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the United Democratic Front, established to oppose the racist elections for the Tri-cameral parliament. He was incorporated into a core group of young activists who operated clandestinely in Lenasia that co-ordinated political activism and resistance to apartheid in "Indian areas" in the old province of Transvaal.

In 1985, Isu attended the politically-charged funeral of the "Cradock Four", who were activists in the Eastern Cape that were killed and burnt by the security police. On their return from Cradock, the bus in which they were travelling was intercepted by the Security Police near Lenasia and all the activists, including Isu, were detained. Among them were Maniben Sita, Kim Morgan, Ismail Momoniat, Prema Naidoo, Feizel Mamdoo, Rashid Seedat, Kuben Naidoo, Yusuf Areff, Mosheen Moosa, Neeshan Balton, Amos Masondo, Paul Mashatile, Ronnie Swartz, Rapu Molekane, Murphy Morobe and Kenny Fihla. During their detention Isu led two hunger strikes of the detainees; a three-day strike against deplorable prison conditions, and a 10-day hunger strike against the State of Emergency. They were all released on 7 March 1986, when the State of Emergency was lifted and received a heroes' welcome at a public rally hosted by the TIC in Lenasia.



*Kathrada Foundation board members, Rashid Seedat and Prema Naidoo with Isu, all three of whom were detained in 1985.*

## Building the ANC



*Isu speaking at an ANC Lenasia meeting while a young Cyril Ramaphosa, who is now president of the ANC, looks on.*

*Photo courtesy of Ahmed Darsot*



*Despite his white hair and having aged during his years in prison, Isu still cut an imposing figure.*

*Photo courtesy of Ahmed Darsot*

Isu was reunited with Ahmed Kathrada, on his release in October 1989. Isu recalls the day of Kathy's release:

*"I rushed off to see him at his brother Solly's home. I was the first guest to have arrived there. We embraced, and I don't mind admitting that I could not help shedding copious amounts of tears upon seeing my friend and comrade whom I had last seen in May 1982."*

Some months later, February 1990, the ANC was unbanned and Nelson Mandela was released. This set the scene for re-building the ANC within the country, which Isu was drawn into at both regional and local levels. He served on the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) Region's Interim Committee (IRC), convened by Kgalema Motlanthe.

Isu played an active role on the IRC, but most of his energies were directed at building the ANC in Lenasia and surrounding areas. It was expected that he would play a key role in building the ANC locally because of his impeccable ANC credentials, as well as qualities that were widely admired by activists and the wider community.

The Lenasia branch of the ANC was the first to be established in the PWV Region, encompassing greater Lenasia, Ennerdale and adjacent informal settlements. Isu was elected chairperson, along with Prema Naidoo (deputy chairperson), Rashid Seedat (secretary), Neeshan Balton (organiser), Jeets Hargovan, Daniel Bovu and Fazela Seedat.

Isu was a central figure in the ANC Lenasia Branch from its inception and was re-elected chairperson annually until 1994.

The early 1990s saw multiparty negotiations taking place in Kempton Park. The TIC (along with the Natal Indian Congress) had an agreement that it would also participate in these talks in order to strengthen the ANC's hand at the negotiations. Isu was among the TIC members, including Cassim Saloojee, Prema Naidoo and Firoz Cachalia, that served as delegates.



## Parliamentary Politics



*Isu receiving the Order of Luthuli (Silver) from former President Thabo Mbeki. Isu served under both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations as a parliamentarian.*

## LALOO 'Isu' CHIBA - Principled Activist, Humble Revolutionary and Selfless Leader

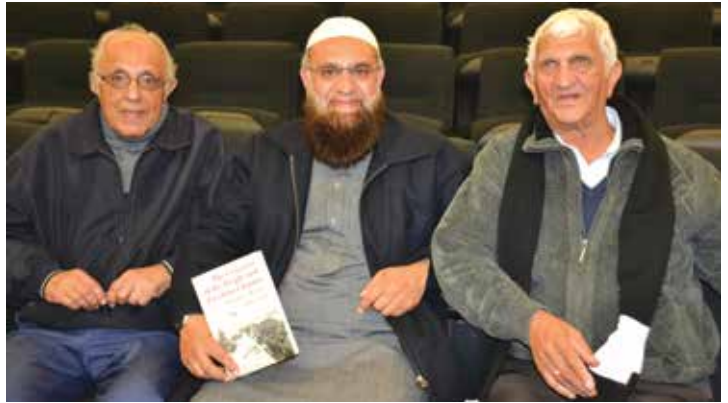
After four years of negotiations, a date was finally set for the first national democratic elections in South Africa. Isu was up very early on the morning of 27 April 1994, to visit the polling stations in Lenasia and surrounding areas. When the final count was done, Isu was elected as a Member of Parliament for the ANC. In this he was joined by several other public representatives from Lenasia, notably, Ahmed Kathrada, Dr 'RAM' Saloojee, Mohamed Valli Moosa, Priscilla Jana, Mosheen Moosa and Ismail Vadi.

Isu served as an ANC MP for 10 years until 2004, when he announced his retirement from formal politics. In parliament he served on the Portfolio Committees of Correctional Services, Housing and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA).

It was in SCOPA that he earned the reputation as an uncompromising public representative that grilled military officials, allegedly involved in the "arms deal" scandal.



*Kuben Naidoo, Isu, Fazela Seedat, Ahmed Kathrada, Fatima Seedat, and Rashid Seedat. Photo: Mohammed Ismail*



*Isu, Ahmed Kathrada and Ismail Vadi travelled regularly to Cape Town as parliamentarians. Before Isu and Kathrada passed on, they were planning to do one more 'road trip' to Cape Town for 'old time's sake'.*



*Isu and former ANC Treasurer General, Zweli Mkhize.*



*Activists Dr Rashid 'RAM' Saloojee, former Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, Moosa 'Mosie' Moola and Sophia Williams-de Bruyn at Isu's funeral in Lenasia. Photo: Zenzile Mavuso*

# Ahmed Kathrada Foundation



*Isu and Ahmed Kathrada supported the Foundation's youth-led annual Operation Winter Warm. They are seen with young people at the Lenasia Cricket Stadium during the Winter Warm Campaign. Photo: Zaakirah Vadi*

## LALOO 'Isu' CHIBA - Principled Activist, Humble Revolutionary and Selfless Leader

Isu had never retired from active politics. He never ended his revolutionary activism. He remained politically active until his passing in December 2017. He served on the Board of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and would go to its offices daily to engage with young activists, mentor them and gently direct the affairs of the Foundation. Weekly, he would meet with his lifelong comrade and mentor, Ahmed Kathrada, and discuss the political developments of the day.

He was deeply saddened by Kathy's death on 28 March 2017, and was not the same thereafter; he yearned for his friend and comrade of 60 years. But he continued his activism with the same fervour as before. Yet, all could see that his

health was failing him. He passed away of a heart attack on the morning of 8 December 2017. The thousands who attended his memorial service the very next day bear testimony to his inspiring leadership to the many generations of Congress activists over 60 years. For our generation, Isu is a 'Principled Activist, Humble Revolutionary and Selfless Leader'!

We are humbled and honoured that we have had the privilege of working with a revolutionary leader of the calibre of Laloo 'Isu' Chiba. His love for humanity; his affection for his comrades; his humility and modesty in leadership, and his unwavering commitment to the struggle for national liberation in South Africa knew no bounds.



*Isu celebrating his last birthday with staff at the Foundation*



*Board member Yunus Chamda was also present.*



*Isu sharing a word with Zenzile Mavuso and Shaheda Seedat on his 87th birthday.*



*Foundation Board members with calendars capturing Oliver Tambo Centenary. The photo was taken at Ahmed Kathrada's last Board meeting before his passing.*

How can we remember this giant of our revolution? Perhaps two poems from history best capture his spirit: *Invictus* by William E. Henley and the *Epitaph on the Grave of Robert Emmet* :

## ***Invictus***

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments  
the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.



*Isu supporting Operation Winter Warm.*



*The Foundation's Executive Director Neeshan Balton with Isu and Ahmed Kathrada at the Lenasia Gandhi Walk.*



*Isu joins staff outside the Foundation's offices for an informal meeting.*

## ***Epitaph of Robert Emmet***

Let no man write my epitaph;  
for as no man who knows  
my motives dare now vindicate them,  
let not prejudice or ignorance,  
aspersion.

Let them and me rest in obscurity  
and peace,  
and my tomb remain uninscribed,  
and my memory in oblivion,  
until other times and other men can  
do justice to my character.

When my country takes her place  
among the nations of the earth,  
then and not till then,  
let my epitaph be written.

I have done.



Isu protesting in favour of a boycott of Israeli goods.  
Photo: Zaakirah Vadi



Isu and Foundation Board member and Gauteng Premier David Makhura at the Palestinian Solidarity Alliance's Walk for Freedom.  
Photo: Zaakirah Vadi



Isu and fellow struggle activist Manibhen Sita at Mandela's statue at the Union Buildings calling for the release of Marwan Barghouti and all other Palestinian political prisoners. Photo: Zaakirah Vadi



*Isu speaking to Foundation Board member and Kathrada's wife, Barbara Hogan, at Kathrada's memorial service.*

*Photo: Zaakirah Vadi*



*Irene Menell, Elinor Sisulu, Foundation board member Max Sisulu, Isu, Foundation Board member Zarina Motala, Ramnie Dinat and Cas Coovadia at a press conference announcing Kathrada's passing.*

*Photo: Zaakirah Vadi*



*Isu and fellow anti-apartheid veteran Dr Essop Jassat at Kathrada's grave in Johannesburg with young Palestinian activists, Ahed Tamimi and Janna Jihad. Photo: Zaakirah Vadi*

## From whose lives ought we to learn? A Tribute to Isu Laloo Chiba, ANC/SACP Veteran

By Raymond Suttner

Comrade Isu Chiba represents qualities in his life that we can use as a model for all of us today. What are these qualities and why do they continue to be so relevant?

We ask and answer this because all of us need to draw lessons from the lives of people like Comrade Chiba in order to make meaningful contributions to building a peaceful society, a caring society, a society where we all have dignity and respect for others.

Now even if we unpack what the qualities of Isu have been, many of these emerged under conditions that no longer exist – armed struggle and imprisonment, torture and detention. We have to work out what it is that characterised Comrade Isu and then each of us has to ask ourselves whether or not we accept these qualities and values, and if we believe these are important, we must continue to apply these values to our own lives. There is no recipe for application. Each of us confronts choices and difficult decisions every day of our lives. I want to ask how we can draw on the life of Comrade Chiba to guide us in what we do and how we can do so in a manner that affirms others, that builds the confidence of others, that does not hurt others, but creates friendships and mutual respect.

Comrade Isu is a man of integrity. He is known for his

unwillingness to do anything that is not open and transparent. He is spoken of as someone who is what he publicly appears to be. There is no falsity or pretense in his way of existing. He is a person who can be trusted. We need more such people and we need ourselves to be individuals who can be trusted by others. All of us need to try to be the type of person who can be known to honour his or her word and never be devious.

Comrade Isu is modest. He never boasts about what he has done, considerable as that is. He does not spend time recounting his long service in the struggle. He does not think that that is sufficient in any case. He believes that he must re-earn respect every day of his life.

His reputation is not something he treats lightly, modest as he may be. He does not flaunt his achievements, but he is conscious that he is a person who others may

look up to and consequently never does anything that may be taken as an example unless it is honourable and true to the convictions to which his life and sacrifices have been devoted.

Modesty is thus important, but a sense of one's place in the world, that others admire one, even if one does not look for that, is necessary. One needs to ensure that others follow one's example with an awareness of the new conditions under



*Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa visiting Isu at his home in Lenasia. Photo: Ismail Vadi*





*Isu and his wife Luxmi. Photo: Chiba family album*

which we live. Thus one should obviously not take Isu's history in armed struggle as a reason for continued use of violence. The secrecy of underground armed struggle should not be a reason to act furtively and without openness now.

Comrade Isu is unselfish. He is what every communist is supposed to be, because it is not knowledge of Marx, Engels and Lenin that has made people like Yusuf Dadoo, Moses Kotane, Bram Fischer, Ruth First, Josie Palmer, Chris Hani, famous in our history. It is the quality of their lives that they shared the sorrows and joys of others, that they recognised the difficulties of others and tried to assist even without being told, that make them people whose road we can follow.

Caring about others is a major part of comradeship. The basic quality of comradeship has to be treating the other person as one wants to be treated oneself and caring about the other

whether or not you have been told there is a special reason to look out for that other person. A comrade is a person whom one stands by in good times and bad times and that is what Isu has always done.

Isu is not a person who cares for possessions and everything that is his is used for family, friends and comrades wherever they meet. He has not joined the struggle for any reasons other than to achieve a society where we are all free. He has done so unostentatiously and that is why he is not well known. He has made no attempts to remedy that 'invisibility' and carried on in his own simple way just doing what he has thought to be right.

Isu is a brave person. That much is known about his political life. But bravery means something different in 2010 from 1964 or the mid-1980s, and it relates to other qualities of Comrade Isu. To be brave is often to be gentle, to be tender, and to be willing to hug instead of strike a blow. Bravery may be to rethink one's own thoughts where previously we had to hold the line against the divisions of the enemy. We now need the bravery of those who are willing to renew our thinking on a range of issues. This does not mean that everything is thrown out of the window. But it does mean that even what has been sacred requires the bravery of the enquiring mind. Isu has been a mentor and teacher but in a world where it is easy to become dogmatic, he has never stopped being open.

Isu is an emotional person. When he hugs a man or a woman he does so not as a comradely formality but because he really cares for others and he builds up courage and strength in others, by this warmth that he conveys. He passes his own powerful integrity, strength, gentleness and love onto others. In doing that he is saying: take this from me and make a better world, and in so doing, we know we will become better people.



Isu's sister, Jashoo; sisters-in-law, Lillian and Luxmi; Jashoo's sister-in-law, Ramji; Isu's wife, Luxmi and his sister, also Luxmi. Standing: Isu's brother, Daya; brother-in-law, Govind; his father, Chiba; his brother, Govind, Jashoo's brother-in-law, Goolab; Isu's brother-in-law, Jeram and brother, Raman.



Isu and his wife Luxmi with his sister Jashoo, brother Govind and Govind's wife, Louise Colvin.



Isu, his daughter Yasvanti, Minister of Human Settlements, Lindiwe Sisulu, and Geeta Rowjee at the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation's 2017 fundraising dinner.



Isu with his wife Luxmi and their children Yasvanti, Gita and Kaylash, sons-in-law, Rashid Moosa, Navin Chhiba and Vimal Lalla and grandchildren, Shaheen, Shakil, Shafiq, Zain, Nishaan, Leilaa and Shakila.



Isu and his great grandson Rayaan.



Right: Isu and his great grandchildren Kayan, Sania and Arianna.



*Former Robben Island prisoners Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada with SACP leader Joe Slovo and Isu at the start of the Annual Gandhi Walk in Lenasia. Photo: Images of ANC Politics in Lenasia*



*Activists Dr Yusuf 'Chummy' Saloojee and his wife Hawa with Ahmed Kathrada, Isu and Luxmi. Chummy and Hawa were also Isu's doctor and physiotherapist respectively. Photo: Yunus Chamda*



*Isu with anti-apartheid leaders Walter and Albertina Sisulu and other activists. Photo: Chiba family album*



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