

# THE TESTIMONY OF MARION SPARG

*Marion Sparg is a 29-year-old white woman from an ordinary, middle class family. She was a trained journalist and her real political involvement started after the death in detention of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko. She left South Africa in 1981 and joined the ranks of MK. She was later assigned to the editorial staff of Voice of Women, the official journal of the ANC Women's Section. After the SADF's raid in Lesotho in 1982, in which 32 ANC civilian members and 19 Lesotho citizens were killed, Sparg felt that she had to join the operative ranks of MK. Some of the ANC leaders tried to dissuade her, but she felt that there was no other way for her to express her commitment to the urgent need for the liquidation of the apartheid regime. With remarkable dedication, she carried out her missions as an MK soldier. In 1986 she was arrested and convicted of treason, arson and attempted arson. She was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment.*

*On March 2 1986, while in underground life inside South Africa, Marion Sparg wrote a letter to her mother in which she made a last desperate appeal for her parents' understanding of her life. The letter was not posted. Five days later, on March 7, she was arrested and the letter was among various items confiscated by the police. The following are excerpts from the letter.*

Dear Mom,

It is not an easy task for me to explain myself in a letter like this, but I am going to try; so just bear with me as I stumble along ...

I can understand that in a way you have cause to resent me, for bringing more pain and problems to a family that has already had more than its fair share of trouble. I know also that I have to work out how to survive on my own without depending on anyone. And I believe I am doing all I can at the moment ...

Yes, I do feel sad at not being able to be with you and the family. But I do not regret giving up my previous life. I do not regret the commitment I have made. The struggle to get this country free now is my life. If I did not truly believe in what I am doing I would have succumbed to a nervous breakdown or some form of insanity a long time ago. I don't really expect you or Dad to agree fully with my actions. But I did have an idea that you understood a lit-

tle. I value the past four or five years more than you could know. The people I have met, the experiences I have gone through, I believe have made me a more complete person. My life has meaning now. I know where I am going and I know we will reach there — even if I don't personally make it. I have never been more fulfilled. This is probably sounding very trite, but I hope it conveys something of the depth and understanding I've gained over the past few years.

Daily happenings only serve to increase my determination, and I am afraid harden me a little each day. In Alexandra last week more than 80 people were shot dead. Most were simply teenagers with nothing more than stones in their hands. But I can understand the fear of the white policemen and soldiers as they faced those children. I can understand their fear as they failed to understand how children with stones were prepared to take on armoured cars and sub-machine guns. But anyway, I'm not going to give you a lecture on that. I do get very bitter and angry still, but what these past years have given me is confidence and hope — the knowledge that we will win. The government knows it too.

They are only prolonging the agony for all — black and white. It is the people who give me hope — not only those kids in Alexandra and elsewhere. But especially the individuals I've met —

black and white. I've been able to discover what real friendship, love and trust are all about. I know our future is safe in their hands.

I think it is natural for a child to want to make its parents proud. And although it is hard for you to understand, let alone feel proud, I hope one day, if time is kind, you will be able to understand and feel proud. I know it.

If you could meet the people and know the people I am close to, you would understand. Do you remember the young white guy who was killed in the SADF raid on Gaborone? Well, his parents said afterwards they never understood until they went to his funeral and met all his friends and those who worked with him.

They said only then they realised how much he meant to others, and that his life was good and worthwhile, even if they still couldn't accept all his actions completely. I only hope it doesn't have to take death to bring you to that understanding.

And in any way I have made enemies of my family and some previous friends. For if they are to defend apartheid then I am their enemy for life. It is painful but true. But it is not all that surprising, for South Africa is in a state of war. And war turns brother against brother, and father against son. You see there is really no going back for me. Neither can I stand still. We can only move forward now.

If it means my life I am quite prepared.

In fact I'll be proud to be counted amongst those who fought and died for this country and people.

This is probably sounding very romantic and reckless, but then it is very difficult to put down in words the simple yet profound principles of one's life. If I were to live like a 'mole', that is part of the price that must be paid. And it is a very small price compared to what others have gone through, and are still going through.

I suppose the one thing I really need to talk to you about is wanting to have another child. I've met and loved other men — and especially one now whose child I would be proud to have. But I know there is no time. I want to be able

to be with my child all the time. And now there is so much else to do. I had virtually made up my mind that I was going to have a child no matter what. And then there was the SADF raid on Lesotho in December last year, where amongst others a young white woman and her coloured husband were killed. They were shot dead in bed.

Their one-year-old daughter lay screaming next to their bodies until neighbours came to fetch her. Then I thought, God!

I don't want my baby to have to go through that. And yet the baby will have cause to be proud one day. So who knows, maybe I will be lucky enough to have a child.

I don't know if I have gone any way towards trying to explain myself. I hope some makes sense to you. In the end you'll see, it will be for the good of all. This war has to be fought to the bitter end. And it is going to be bitter. I have no illusions about that. But in the end there will be a happier life for all of us — black and white. And I quite honestly believe that this is going to happen in our lifetime, not that of our children or grandchildren.

Just know that I do love you even if you feel exasperated, betrayed or hurt.

Yours

Marion

## TO NELSON MANDELA

### STATEMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH LEADERS ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 70TH BIRTHDAY

NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA

On the occasion of Dr Mandela's 70th birthday, 18 July 1988. We, the undersigned, are Clergy, Church layworkers and professional theologians in South Africa.

We write to honour you on this your 70th birthday.

As Christians we acknowledge Jesus Christ as the supreme Lord, from whom all human authority derives. Under his Lordship we are called to resist all illegitimate authority, and share in the total liberation of humanity from all that denies complete human life. In South Africa this means struggling against the tyranny of apartheid, and for a country free of injustice, exploitation and discrimination.

We believe this struggle is established in history by Jesus Christ and continued by human beings imitating Christ's obedience and compassion.

We recognise this obedience and compassion in your lifetime of commitment to struggle to liberate all South Africans and in your endurance of tremendous hardship.

We regard it as a crime against humanity that you, a peace-loving man, should languish in an apartheid jail, when you ought to be enjoying the freedom of full family life with your wife, children and grandchildren.

We emphatically reject the propaganda disseminated by this illegal regime and its supporters which dismisses your organisation, the ANC, as terrorist.

We understand the motivations which led you and

other imprisoned and exiled leaders to embark on an armed struggle to enable the liberation of our people.

We regard it as a mark of your true leadership that you choose to remain in prison, rather than accept P W Botha's offer of conditional release.

We agree with you that a peace process can only be initiated by the apartheid government's rejection of the violence of apartheid and the repression with which they maintain it. As such, negotiations are only possible when the state demonstrates its intentions by:

- unconditionally releasing all political prisoners and detainees;
- unconditionally unbanning all the organisations of the people;
- allowing exiles to return without restriction;
- dismantling all apartheid structures, laws and institutions without reserve.

We will continue to pray and strive for a non-racial, democratic South Africa, and for the time when you will take your rightful and proper place amongst us as husband, father, grandfather and national leader.

We declare that your freedom and ours cannot be separated.

May God continue to bless and inspire you.

Yours in the struggle for freedom, justice and peace.  
Signed by Frank Chikane, Albert Nolan, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, Shun Govender, Desmond Tutu, and over 150 other signatories.