

Celebrating a Life



Eleanor Kasrils

(9TH MARCH 1936 – 8TH NOVEMBER 2009)

Eleanor Janette Margaret Kasrils


Eleanor was a life-long member of the ANC and SACP, and an MK veteran. Her grandfather, a Scots engineer had come to South Africa to build the railways. He sent his son, Jimmy Logan, to Scotland to serve an engineering apprenticeship. It was there that Jimmy married Helen Mac Donald, Eleanor's mother. Eleanor was born in Kilmarnock, Scotland in 1936 and migrated to South Africa as an infant.

Eleanor schooled in Durban and studied Art at the Technical College. She had a daughter, Brigid, by a first marriage. As a young, single parent she worked in a bookshop to make ends meet. She would later use the bookshop to smuggle banned literature into the country, notably Che Guevara's "Handbook on Guerrilla Warfare." After the 1960 Sharpeville massacre she met Ronnie Kasrils and joined the Congress of Democrats. She was arrested in a demonstration and spent a week-end in police cells. She organised shop workers for SACTU guided by Billy Nair. She organised solidarity support for striking African nurses at King George Hospital and made lifelong friends with Mate Mfusi and Queeneth Dladla, who led the strike.

She assisted Helen Joseph in getting aid to banished people. She liaised with Bram Fischer on behalf of the Natal underground during the Rivonia trial. She was amongst the first recruits for MK and distinguished herself by her bravery and audacity in attacks on a Security Police building; the felling of electric pylons that plunged Natal into darkness; a daring raid on a storage depot that liberated a ton of dynamite for MK operations.

She was arrested in 1963, kept in solitary confinement and brutally interrogated. She responded by going on hunger strike. A doctor warned the police that she was in danger of dying and had her removed to a mental institution. The police insisted she be locked-up with the mentally insane. When she learnt that they would be transferring her back to prison she made a daring escape with the help of an African nurse. She contacted Ronnie who was in hiding, and they slipped across the border, joining the ANC in Dar Es Salaam. They married in December 1964 with Mate Mafusi and Flag Boshielo as witnesses.

She assisted Moses Kotane who entrusted her with the banking of ANC funds. The couple were deployed to London where their sons Andrew and Christopher were born. She studied geology and graduated as a technician.




With Ronnie working for the struggle she became the family's breadwinner. This enabled the ANC to deploy him to Africa where he was badly needed. Eleanor shouldered family responsibilities without complaint in support of her partner and the struggle.

She was publicly active for the ANC but also secretly recruited and trained cadres. A speciality was teaching disguise and encryption. A Tory Member of Parliament, who acted in apartheid's interests, denounced her for "orchestrating terrorist activities in South Africa" from her flat in Golders Green, London. This allegation was widely publicised. Eleanor challenged him to make his statement outside Parliament and lay himself open to a libel suit but the coward backed off.

After 1990 Eleanor returned to South Africa and for the first time in 15 years was able to enjoy normal married life. She worked for Oliver Tambo until his death. She was indispensable to Ronnie during his 14 year's ministerial service, and was most helpful to his staff who adored her as a warm, generous and kind person. She travelled widely with him projecting our country in an exemplary way. Together with Ronnie she strengthened ties of solidarity all over the world including Cuba, Ireland, Palestine, Russia and various African states. She found time to assist Ardmore Ceramics in becoming a world famous enterprise.

Eleanor is an outstanding example of a stalwart in our ranks who expected neither reward nor recognition. She was admired for her quiet, dignified nature, cheerfulness, honesty, courage and infectious humour. She was greatly enjoying the new life she shared with Ronnie at their home by the sea when she suddenly collapsed and died of a severe stroke, one month short of forty-five years of an exceptionally happy marriage with a partner and family who adored her. Hers was a life of significance, achievement and meaning.

Our Movement and people are indebted to this lovely, gracious lady, who made such a selfless contribution to our freedom and democracy. We salute and celebrate the radiance of her life. She shines for us like a sparkling star in the firmament. Never to be forgotten.



*"She never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it;
She looked for the best in others and gave the best she had"*

Hamba Kahle Comrade Eleanor!



Programme

The Vineyard, Cape Town, 14th November 2009

Welcome

National Anthem

Blessings:

Bishop Geoff Davies

Sheikh Omar Gabier - Muslim Judicial Council

Message from President Jacob Zuma

SACP - Jeremy Cronin (10 Minutes)

'When The Saints Go Marching In' Simon Estes Choir

COSATU (5 Minutes)

Message from former President Thabo Mbeki

MK Veteran General Sandile Sijaki (4 minutes)

'Hambe Kahle Umkhonto'

ANC - Z. Pallo Jordan (12 Minutes)

Andrew Kasrils (10 Minutes)

Hilda Ndude (3 Minutes)

Albie Sachs (3 Minutes)

'Ave Maria' Simon Estes Choir

British Comrade Jane Coker (4 Minutes)

Message from Scotland

Prof. Kader Asmal (3 Minutes)

Message from Ireland

Palestine Solidarity Group (PSG) - Mercia Andrews (4 Minutes)

Aziz Pahad (3 Minutes)

Message from Cuba

Magdalene Louw (2 Minutes)

Message from Russia

Additional messages

Time permitting: Contributions from the floor

Thanks from the Kasrils Family (5 Minutes)

'Our Love Is Here To Stay' performed by Tina Schouw

The Internationale

