

Winnie Mandela, Given Sentence Of 6 Years In Kidnapping Case

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JOHANNESBURG, May 14 — Winnie Mandela, the wife of the African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, was sentenced today to six years in prison in the kidnapping and beating of four young men in Soweto in late 1988.

Justice Michael S. Stegmann, who found her guilty on Monday of kidnapping and being an accessory to the assaults, imposed consecutive sentences of five years for kidnapping and one year on the accessory conviction.

The sentences stunned spectators in the courtroom, some of whom expected Mrs. Mandela to get a suspended sentence. But her lawyer immediately filed an appeal, postponing for months the prospect that Mrs. Mandela will actually go to prison. And there has been speculation that President F. W. de Klerk may yet step in and pardon her in order not to jeopardize proposed negotiations on the nation's future with Mr. Mandela and the African National Congress.

Released on a modest bail equivalent to \$72, Mrs. Mandela looked defiant as she walked out of the courthouse to cheers from several hundred waiting supporters, some of whom held placards declaring "Stop harassing our mother Winnie Mandela" and "No justice under an unjust government."

"We have been found guilty by the media," Mrs. Mandela told reporters.

Mr. Mandela, who did not attend the sentencing, told a news conference at the University of Stellenbosch that he believed his wife was innocent, but added that the verdict and sentence had no direct bearing on talks with the government on dismantling South Africa's apartheid system. He said the talks depended on the government's willingness to meet the Congress's demands that it halt ongoing political violence.

The African National Congress issued a statement saying it viewed the verdict and sentence given Mrs. Mandela "with dismay," but added: "The last word on this entire affair has not yet been spoken. We elect to leave the matter in the hands of the courts, fully confident that in the end the truth will emerge."

The congress's secretary general, Alfred Nzo, had charged on Jan. 25 that Mrs. Mandela's trial amounted to "blatant harassment of the A.N.C." His accusation went

unrepeated today.

In delivering his verdict on Monday, Justice Stegmann found that Mrs. Mandela plotted with other defendants to discredit a local Methodist minister by abducting four street youths living at his manse in Soweto and taking them to Mrs. Mandela's house on Dec. 29, 1988.

Mrs. Mandela's followers went further than she intended, the judge found, and savagely beat the young men to make three of them say they were sexually molested by the minister and the fourth to confess that he was a police informer. The fourth, James "Stompie" Moeketsi Seipei, who was 14 years old, was found on Jan. 6 battered and with his throat cut. Mrs. Mandela's chief bodyguard, Jerry Richardson, was convicted last May of murdering the youth.

Mrs. Mandela did not deny that the four were taken to her home but said she was absent in the Orange Free State when it happened. She said she returned home two days later but was unaware that they had been assaulted.

Justice Stegmann ruled that while Mrs. Mandela's alibi was reasonable, the abductions could not have been carried out without her prior approval. He did not convict her of the more serious crime of assault with intent to commit grievous bodily harm, but he said she became an accessory by covering up the crime and allying herself with the assailants, who were living at her house.

Justice Stegmann was unmoved by an argument from George Bizos, the chief defense lawyer, that Mrs. Mandela did not deserve a harsh sentence because she did not know what happened to the kidnapped youths in her home. The judge said that "a diligence in ignorance is the equivalent of knowledge."

"All she had to do was open her eyes and look around and open her ears and hear, and she would have found out all the information she needed," Justice Stegmann said. The judge said she and her co-defendants had not shown the slightest remorse and might be tempted to do the same again if the opportunity arose.

One of her co-defendants, Xoliswa Falati, was also sentenced to six years in prison for kidnapping and assault. The other, John Morgan, who drove the bus used to abduct the young men, drew a suspended sentence of one year for kidnapping. Four other co-defendants have jumped bail and disappeared.

The conviction and prison sentence raise questions about Mrs. Mandela's future in the African National Congress, which her husband leads as its deputy president. Except for Mr. Mandela, none of its senior officials came to the trial recently to show solidarity with his wife, as some did back in February.

Mr. Mandela, who looked shattered by the guilty verdict on Monday, commented

further on her case at his news conference in Stellenbosch.

“I have never believed that she was guilty of assaulting anyone,” Mr. Mandela said, according to the South African Press Association. “Application for appeal has been filed and I’m advised it should succeed. I trust that soon her name will be cleared completely.”

Mrs. Mandela, who is 56 years old and one of the more radical voices in the Congress, heads its social welfare department, among other posts, and the conviction and sentence could prompt her opponents in the group to press her to give up the key job. The trial was believed to have influenced her resounding defeat in a contest for the presidency of the congress’s Women’s League last month.

South Africans’ opinions of Mrs. Mandela run the gamut. Some white South Africans applauded the verdict, but she remains popular among more militant black youngsters, who regarded her trial as more political harassment.

Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu of Cape Town, the Anglican clergyman who is also an anti-apartheid leader, expressed shock at the severity of the sentence but did not challenge it.

“I would want to stress what she would stress: that the movement is larger than any single individual,” Archbishop Tutu said in a statement release in Cape Town. “The movement will continue and will honor her for the good things that she did and recognize that human beings are human beings.”

But other black South Africans, recalling that the kidnapped youths were black too, argued for a harsher verdict.

“The judge was too lenient,” said a journalist from Soweto, where the Mandelas live. “She should have been convicted of assault too.”

Kenneth Dladla, another Sowetan, said he thought that Mrs. Mandela got what she deserved. “Winnie has disgraced the black community and most of all the A.N.C.,” he said. “In actual fact, she is an outcast, so we can do better without her in the organization.”

Doris Dlamini, who lives in the same neighborhood, Orlando West, thought Mrs. Mandela should have been fined but not jailed, because protests by her supporters could add to the current violence.

“I don’t deny that Mrs. Mandela has committed the crimes mentioned, but for the sake of peace, her sentence should be lightened,” Mrs. Dlamini said.

“I admit that Mrs. Mandela has hurt so many people, but for the sake of her husband, I want the South African government to forgive her,” said Emily Nkuthu, a woman from Sebokeng. “God will punish her in a rightful way which will not disturb the talks between F. W. and Mandela, and most of all peace.”

