

Leaders, heroes, fighters and fathers

The release of tried and tested leaders of our struggle is a victory for the people of South Africa. NUM NEWS introduces the men who remained unwavering in their commitment and bravery during the long years in prison.



OSCAR MPETHA

At a welcome back rally attended by 8 000 people in the Western Cape, Western Cape ANC leader and trade unionist Oscar Mpetha said the armed struggle should continue as long as the South African regime remained fully armed.

Mpetha quoted Chief Albert Luthuli as saying that liberation depended not on the oppressor but entirely on the oppressed.

"The time has come", he said, "you are saying to the oppressor enough is enough." He said pressure had to put on the government to release Mandela.

Oscar Mpetha, 80, had his leg amputated while in prison.

Mpetha was born in 1909 in the

Mount Frere area in the Transkei. In 1934 he sought work in Cape Town, first as a dock worker and later as a factory worker.

He first started organising workers for the African Food and Canning Workers Union in the early 1940's in the fish factories along the West Coast.

In 1951 he became general secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union, and in the same year joined the ANC. He later became president of the ANC in the Cape region. He was also a founder member of Sactu.

During the 1970s, Mpetha was regional chairman of the Transkeian Democratic Party. In 1978 he became national organiser for the AFCWU and also helped form the Nyanga Resident's Association.

He played a leading role in mobilising people against the destruction of Crossroads and in the 1980 bus boycott. In August 1980 he was arrested and charged with murder and terrorism, and June 1983 he was convicted for "incitement".

His wife, Rose, died in 1987 but he was refused permission to attend the funeral. His son Karl died in a car accident.



WALTER SISULU

Walter Sisulu, 76, was a founder member of the ANC Youth League and served as the General Secretary of the ANC from 1949 to 1954.

He played a crucial role in leading the ANC during the years when it grew from a small organisation into a militant mass movement.

On his release Sisulu said: "I have been inspired and grateful to the people for their actions."

Walter Sisulu was born in Engcobo in the Transkei in 1912 - the same year the ANC was formed. The son of a peasant farmer, he was brought up mainly by his mother.

He left school to work in a dairy, and later worked as a gold-miner at the Germiston Rose Deep gold mine.

The thing that pushed him more than anything else to become politically involved, Sisulu recalls, was the pass laws. "Every action taken against the black man on the question of passes, just touched me deeply and worked on my heart."

He had his first taste of organised political activity when he joined Clement Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.

"Kadalie impressed me a great deal", says Sisulu, "because he was an agitator". In 1940 he

joined the ANC.

In 1944 he married Albertina, a nurse who is now a president of the United Democratic Front.

His first position in the ANC was as a member of the militant Youth League, which played a important role in shaping the ANC's new direction.

In 1946 Walter Sisulu was elected to the ANC Transvaal executive, and in 1949 to the position of secretary-general.

Sisulu's contribution was crucial to the Defiance Campaign of 1952. In December that year he was convicted, along with Nelson Mandela and 18 others under the Suppression of Communism Act and received a nine month sentence.

He was among the 156 people charged with high treason in December 1956, and acquitted in March 1961.

In 1960 he was detained for several months under South Africa's first State of Emergency, and in 1962 arrested on several occasions. The following year he was convicted of furthering the aims of the ANC and organising a stayaway. Released on bail he was held under 24 hour house arrest.

He helped found Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961, serving on the high command, and went underground in 1963. He was arrested in the raid on Liliesleaf farm, Rivonia.



RAYMOND MHLABA

Raymond Mhlaba was born into a working class family in Port Elizabeth in 1920. He began his political

education when as a laundry worker he became active in the Council for Non-European Trade

Unions.

Aged only 27, he was elected the ANC branch chairman for Port Elizabeth in 1947. He also served as district secretary for the Communist Party - which he had joined in 1943 - until its banning.

During those days he worked closely with ANC and Communist Party leader Govan Mbeki. Colleagues remember him as a willing teacher of young activists.

Mhlaba was involved in the Eastern Cape bus boycott of 1949, and during the national defiance campaign of 1952 he was volunteer in chief for the Port Elizabeth area.

He was arrested and detained on several occasions during the 1950s and 1960s and was tried in the 1956 treason trial.

In December 1961 he joined Umkhonto we Sizwe, and became a member of the high command soon afterwards.

He was arrested with Walter Sisulu and others at Rivonia and jailed for life. In 1986 he married Dideka Heliso, the mother of his three children, while at Pollsmoor.

On his release, he said his political role in the Eastern Cape had started already.



ANDREW MLANGENI

"I have no doubt in my mind that if it is necessary for me to go back to prison, I'll go tomorrow", said An-

drew Mlangeni on his release.

"South Africa has not yet been liberated. Our coming out of prison has not liberated South Africa from racial oppression".

Andrew Mlangeni grew up in Johannesburg in a family of 12 children. He worked as a golf caddie (he still loves the game) and a bus driver to pay to study further.

He joined the ANC Youth League in 1951 and became involved in the 1952 Defiance Campaign.

Mlangeni became a journalist on the newspaper *New Age* when Ruth First was editor.

In December 1961 he joined the ranks of Umkhonto and became part of the Johannesburg regional command machinery. He left South Africa in 1962 to receive military training and returned the next year.

What motivated him to get involved in politics, he says, is "by nature I'm a person who does not approve of unjust action."

He was arrested in a raid on his Soweto home on July 11 1963. He is married to June and they have four children.



AHMED KATHRADA

"I have been struck very forcefully by the tremendous political consciousness of our people in the country, and this is personified in the UDF, Cosatu and the mass democratic movement."

This was said by Ahmed Kathrada on his release after 26 years in jail. Kathrada said: "these formidable organisations have come up and provided leadership in the struggle".

He grew up in Johannesburg where he was influenced by Dr Dadoo and the Cachalia brothers.

By the age of 11 in 1941 he was attending political meetings, and by 1945 was active in the Transvaal Indian Congress.

He had joined the Communist Party in 1943. He was a key figure

in the cementing of the alliance between the Indian congresses and the ANC in the late 40s.

Kathrada was involved in the National defiance campaign, and the Congress of the People in 1955. He was arrested and detained many times during those years. He joined the military wing of the ANC in 1961. In late 1962 he went underground after he was banned and placed under house arrest.

Arrested at Rivonia, he was convicted of sabotage and sentenced to life imprisonment at the age of 34. Although his lawyers said the evidence against him was flimsy, he chose not to appeal in solidarity with his comrades.

Forty eight years after he had joined the organisation, Kathrada is still supportive of the ideals of the Communist Party. He is confident that only socialism can solve the problems of society.



ELIAS MOTSOALEDI

On his release, Elias Motsoaledi said the struggle should continue until Mandela and all other

political prisoners were free.

He added that "women occupy an important role in the struggle as they are the ones who mould the nation.

Trade unionist Motsoaledi, 65, was born in Sekhukhuneland in 1924.

As a teenager he moved to Johannesburg and became a factory worker. He soon became a leader in the Leather Worker's Association and joined the Communist Party of SA. He served as chairperson of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) in the 1950s.

Motsoaledi joined the ANC in 1948 and later served on the organisation's branch executive. He was involved in the defiance campaign in the Transvaal and was banned. He was detained during the 1960 state of Emergency and soon afterwards joined Umkhonto's regional structures.

He was arrested at home. He has a wife, Caroline, and seven children - three of whom are in exile.

Transkei Bunga as the Idutywa representative.

In 1955 Mbeki returned to Port Elizabeth where he served as the local editor of the *New Age* newspaper.

After being a leader of the ANC in the Eastern Cape, Mbeki was elected the national chairperson of the ANC in 1956.

He spent five months in prison during the 1960 emergency. On his release, he played a leading role in the All-African conference in Pietermaritzburg which called for a national convention.

In 1963, he defied a house arrest order and went underground to join Umkhonto we Sizwe. He was arrested with other ANC leaders at Liliesleaf Farm

GOVAN MBEKI

Released in 1987, Govan Mbeki has played a central role paving the way for the homecoming of his fellow accused in the Rivonia trial.

Although restricted to New Brighton township, Mbeki has continued his role in the mass

democratic movement.

Born in 1910 in the Nqamakwe district in the Transkei, Mbeki went to Fort Hare University where he joined the ANC in 1935.

After obtaining a BA in 1937, Mbeki taught at several Eastern Cape schools but was dismissed for his political activities.

In 1943 he was elected to the

WILTON MKWAYI

On his release Wilton Mkwai appealed for unity in the struggle. "The ANC has always worked for unity and will continue to do so."

Wilton Mkwai grew up in Port Elizabeth, and his family was deeply affected by having their land taken away from them. His father signed him up for membership of the ANC at the age of 17.

He was involved in CNETU and in the defiance campaigns and bus boycotts. He was volunteer in chief for the Eastern Cape and was involved in the Congress of the People and the formation of Sactu. He served as treasurer for SACTU.

During 1952 and 1960 he was arrested several times and was in the treason trial of 1956. He went aboard after the ANC's banning and received military training in China.

He later returned secretly to South Africa. It was during this time that he met Irene, a nurse who helped him after he was wounded by police. After escaping arrest at Rivonia, he led the high command for 13 months. He was captured in August 1964.

Every year from 1965 he and Irene applied for permission to marry. It was only in 1987 that he was given permission to marry her. Tragically, she died last year before his release.