

## 2. Preface to English Edition

By Ahmed Kathrada

Among the numerous deprivations of imprisonment, a very important one is ignorance about the struggle both in the country and internationally. Unbelievable as it may sound, because of our isolation on Robben Island we knew almost nothing about our white comrades who were in Pretoria Prison. For instance, the very first time I heard of the way the warders treated the ailing Bram Fischer was in Hugh Lewin's book, *Bandiet*, in which he mentions how, in order to alleviate Bram's pain, Denis and his comrades had to resort to the use of broomsticks as substitutes for crutches.

It goes without saying that the experience of every freedom fighter, both inside prison and outside is unique.

Therefore the translation of this book written by thirty one comrades and friends of Denis is undoubtedly a valuable addition to knowledge not only about Denis, but also about other comrades; and more importantly about significant aspects of the struggle in which his comrades were involved. I will refer to just one very important example from the informative contribution of Sandi Sijake. During the Rivonia Trial we heard about the Mamre Camp, at which Denis was the Commandant. It is Sandi who elaborates about its non-racial composition, the security with which it was organized, and the participation of Albie Sachs, Chris Hani and others, and much more. Although Sandi and I were together on Robben Island for about 10 of his 15 years, I can't remember him mentioning that he had known Denis in that capacity.

A major challenge facing us today is ignorance of the past, especially among the youth. This book once again brings to the fore the fact that ours was a struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa. Although this is enshrined in our Constitution there is the ever present need to emphasize and propagate these concepts. They are the foundation stones upon which our fledgling democracy stands.

The twenty two non-South African contributors to this book are from Britain, Germany (Federal Republic and the former German Democratic Republic, i.e. West and East), Sweden and the Netherlands, men and women who have a wide variety of occupations and interests. They continue to help in the reconstruction of our society and spreading the concepts of non-racism and non-sexism. Their recollections of their activities in the solidarity campaigns that were so important in isolating the apartheid regime, and their more direct ways of assisting us in our struggle for freedom, help us to overcome our ignorance of the past.

Happily the book coincides with Denis's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday year.

**Ahmed "Kathy" Kathrada** born 21 August 1929.. Sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia Trial. Imprisoned on Robben Island and in Pollsmoor Prison. Released in October 1989. Joined Young Communist League at 12 years of age. Indian Congress anti Pegging Act campaign in 1941. Antiwar activity of the Non-European United Front. Matriculated at the Johannesburg Indian High School. In 1946 fulltime activist in Passive Resistance campaign against the "Ghetto Act" that restricted the rights of Indians to freely choose where to live and work. Among 2000 arrested in that campaign and imprisoned in Durban for a month. Student at Witwatersrand University. He was a delegate of the Transvaal (now Gauteng) Indian Youth Congress to the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Berlin in 1951. He worked at WFDY headquarters in Budapest for 9 months. With the growing closeness of the ANC and Indian Congresses Kathy met leaders such as Mandela and Sisulu. One of the 156 accused in the Treason Trial from 1956 to 1961. All acquitted. He continued his political activity and was arrested and detained several times, subjected to house arrest, and banning orders. He went underground in early 1963, and was arrested at Liliesleaf Farm, Rivonia 11 June 1963. That was his 18<sup>th</sup> arrest on political grounds. In prison he obtained a B.A.(history and criminology), B.Bibliography (Library Science and African Studies), and two BA Honours degrees. After the unbanning of political organisations in 1990 Kathy served in the Interim Leadership of both ANC and SACP, but resigned from SACP when elected to the National Executive

Committee of the ANC. Kathy was elected to parliament in the first free elections in 1994. He was appointed Political Adviser in the Office of President Nelson Mandela. He has received the ANC's highest award Isitwalandwe, and honorary doctorates from 4 US Universities and from University of the Witwatersrand. Freeman of the City of Johannesburg. Awarded Pravasi Bharatiya Samman by the Indian Ministry of Overseas Affairs.

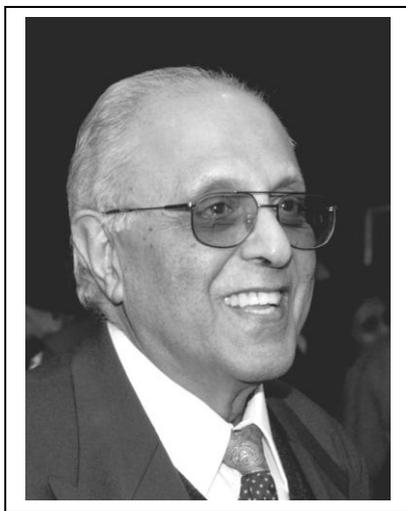


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