

1980s: WOMEN ORGANISE

In the 1980s, the context of resistance changed. International opposition to apartheid had grown and international boycotts of Apartheid South Africa were under way.

Opposition took many forms - many countries had economic sanctions against South Africa, the foreign investment in the country began to decline and sporting boycotts restricted the country's participation in international events. Internal resistance organizations had also grown and become more militant, and there were more alliances across race and class barriers. Rioting, protests and confrontations with police and the army were occurring on an almost daily basis.

From the end of the 1970s, women were integrated into many aspects of the liberation struggle. They occupied positions of leadership in political organisations and trade unions and played prominent roles. Many women went into exile and carried on their activism in other parts of Africa and abroad. In the 1980s women's organisations aligned these organisations to the newly formed United Democratic Front (UDF), which was widely described as the 'ANC in disguise'.

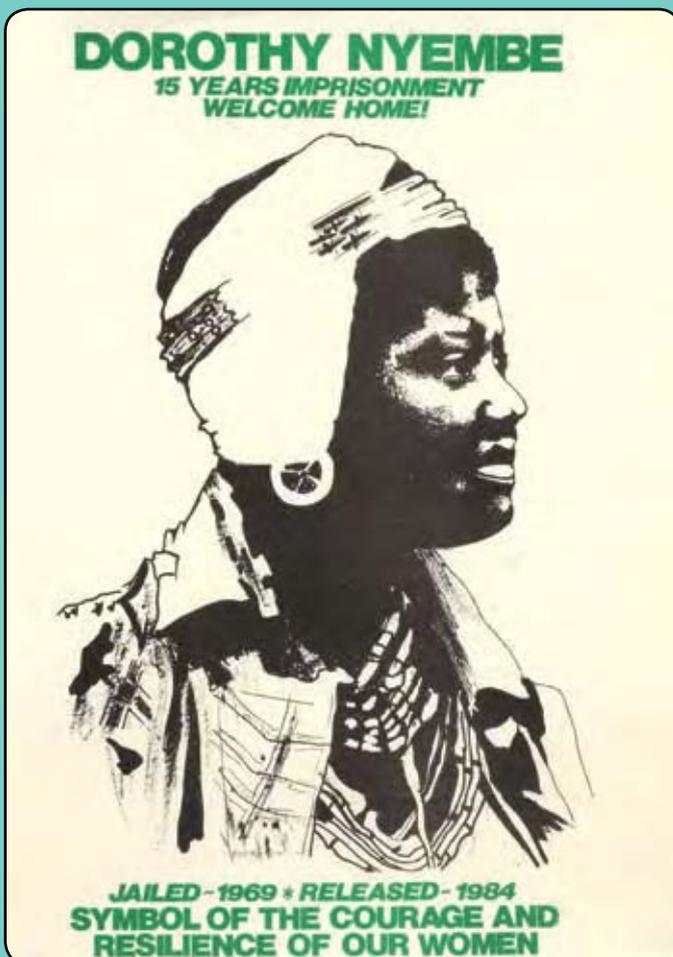
It was clear that the South African government was now facing more organised resistance than ever before. In 1984, PW

Botha made a desperate effort to make reforms by introducing a new constitution and created the Tricameral Parliament. Three parliaments were set up - one each for those classified as 'white', 'coloured' and Indian. However, this was widely rejected by 'coloured' and Indian people and seemed doomed to fail from the start.

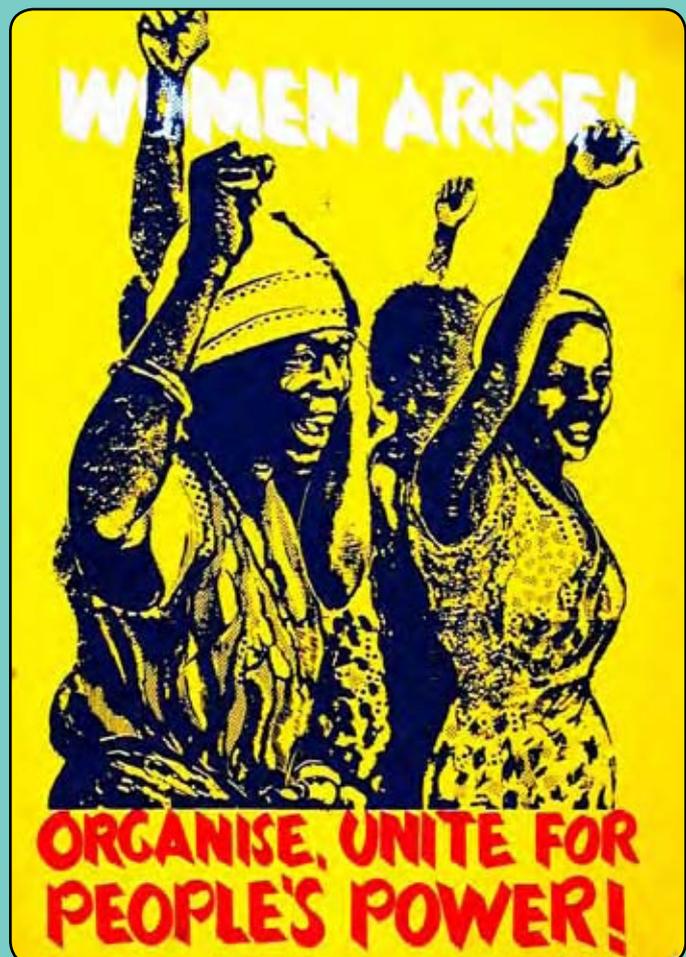
Press freedom was more strictly restricted. Resistance continued, with ethnic conflict and struggles between hostel and town dwellers adding to the turmoil. In an attempt to deal with the escalating protests, the government implemented successive States of Emergency during which many people were detained and organisations restricted. About 12% of the 3050 people detained in 1986/87 were women and girls.

Some of these women were tortured. Pregnant women were often assaulted, which led to miscarriage. Body searches, vaginal examinations and other humiliating procedures also occurred, and were all reported by former detainees at the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in 1996.

When P.W. Botha suffered a stroke in 1989 and F.W. de Klerk took over, it had become clear that a process of reform was necessary. He released a group of prominent political prisoners, including Walter Sisulu, and began to consult with them.



Dorothy Nyembe Poster, Litho, 1984.
Designed by Thami Mnyele for ANC Lusaka.



Women Arise, Silkscreen, 1984. Designed by Thami Mnyele for Medu Art Ensemble.

UNITED WOMEN'S CONGRESS, 1981

As a result of parents' reactions to the 1976 student revolts and their aftermath, ex-FEDSAW (Federation of South African Women) members in the Western Cape began organising themselves. In 1981 they formed the United Women's Congress (UWCO) in 1981. The organisation took up campaigns such as childcare, bread prices and bus fare increases. Many UWCO branches led housing campaigns, launched rent boycotts and defended children against police brutality.

As part of the aim to unite all women in the fight against Apartheid, UWCO assisted in setting up civic organisations and UWCO spearheaded the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF). In 1986, UWCO began a process of re-establishing the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) by uniting with other women's organisations such as the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) and the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW).



Students protest against the apartheid government killing of exiles in front line states Lamontville, Durban in 1986. *Photograph by Omar Badsha.*

UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT, 1983

The United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched in Mitchell's Plain near Cape Town on 20 August 1983. About 600 delegates from more than 475 organisations and a crowd of about 13 000 people converged on the area. The delegates represented students, youth, workers, civics, women, religious groups, sports bodies and trade unions. The gathering was the biggest crowd of anti-Apartheid resisters since the mass meetings of the Con-

gress Alliance in the 1950s.

The initial aim of the UDF was to oppose the National Party's Tricameral parliamentary proposals. They used the slogan 'UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides'. The UDF soon became the leading anti-Apartheid political movement within the country, with more than 1, 5 million supporters. It mobilised nationwide resistance, led a series of boycotts, and became involved in labour issues.

Many of the members of the UDF were banned but continued their activities underground.



Cheryl Carolus speaking at the University of the Witwatersrand on Women's Day, 1984. 1984 was the ANC's Year of the Woman. *Photograph by Gille de Vlieg, supplied by African Media Online.*



UDF WOMEN'S CONGRESS

The Congress was formed on 23 April 1987 by all women's organisations that were affiliated to the UDF and included women's co-operatives, women's sections of youth and civic organisations, unions and church groups. The Congress was formed as a body that would uphold the Freedom Charter and the Women's Charter of the 1950s. It was aimed at teaching men and women in the UDF about women's oppression, methods of how to do away with all forms of discrimination based on gender and to talk about women's problems in all UDF organisations. It also aimed to increase women's skills.

While the UDF was non-aligned, most of its leadership and affiliates were either members of the underground ANC or sympathetic to it. The UDF also adopted the ANC's Freedom Charter as it represented the aims of a free South Africa and provided a basis for a democratic constitution. With the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, many of the prominent UDF members joined the ANC. Soon afterwards, on 20 August 1991, the UDF was disbanded.



SHEILA WEINBERG

1945-2004

Sheila Weinberg was born in Johannesburg to politically active parents, Eli and Violate Weinberg, who were members of the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP). Sheila Weinberg was involved in her parents' activism from an early age. She attended the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955 when she was only ten years old! She also painted slogans and assisted in the underground activities of the ANC and SACP. During the periods in which her parents were in detention or in exile she was looked after by Helen Joseph.

Weinberg was detained for the first time in 1964 and at 19 years was the youngest detainee at the time. She was held for 65 days at Johannesburg Fort Prison but was released without being charged. In 1976, Weinberg was served with her first banning order which restricted her to Johannesburg. During this time she was the secretary of the Human Rights Committee and wrote a bulletin detailing Apartheid repression which was subsequently banned.

In 1983, as a leading member of the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC) she worked to popularise the United Democratic Front in her constituency. During the 1980s, Weinberg was also central to the activities of the Transvaal branch of the Black Sash and the Five Freedoms Front, which worked to activate white resistance to Apartheid. She was a founder and Board member of the Administration Training Project which provided training and support to civic organisations, trade unions and the UDF in the 1980s. When the UDF was restricted she helped found the Friends of the UDF which helped raise funds for the UDF.

After the ANC was unbanned in 1991, Weinberg worked for the Congress' North East Johannesburg branch, which was later renamed after her father. From 1994 until the General Election in 2004 she served as a member of the Gauteng Legislature. During this period she was active in protests and vigils held against the violence in the Middle East. She also took particular interest in assisting emerging farmers in her constituency of Westonaria and fought for the rights of the disabled. On 11 November 2004, Weinberg suffered a brain aneurysm and died shortly afterwards.



VICTORIA MXENGE

1942-1985

Mxenge was born in King Williams Town in the Eastern Cape. She matriculated from Healdtown High School in Fort Beaufort. While she was completing a nursing diploma, she began attending political meetings at Fort Hare University. After marrying Griffiths Mlungisi Mxenge, who was studying at Natal University, in November 1964 Mxenge moved to Durban where she trained as a midwife, and later also obtained a Public Health Certificate. In 1974, she registered for a B.Proc Degree with Unisa. Mxenge graduated in 1981 and was articled to her husband's legal firm and later that year she was admitted as an attorney.

After her marriage, Mxenge's political activities were mainly in support of her husband's political and trade union activities. He was repeatedly banned, imprisoned and placed in detention. In 1981, Mxenge's husband was killed by an Apartheid hit squad. Victoria Mxenge was left to continue her husband's busy legal practice. After the death of her husband she began to play a more prominent role in the liberation struggle.

She took on many sensitive political trials on behalf of those accused by the Apartheid government. Mxenge was murdered in her home in Umhlangeni while preparing for the trial in 1985. Her funeral was attended by approximately 10 000 people. The government said she had died from head injuries and had been murdered by persons unknown. In 1997, as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings, the ANC named Marvin Sefako as her killer. Sefako admitted to the murder of more than 20 people which had been ordered by the Durban branch of the Security Police. For Mxenge's murder, Sefako stated he had been paid R5000.



Helen Joseph (back) and mourners at the memorial service in Durban for Victoria Mxenge, who was assassinated by government agents in 1985. Photograph by Omar Badsha.

NATAL ORGANISATION OF WOMEN, 1983

From 1980 women in Durban had been gathering on an annual basis to commemorate the Women's March of 9 August 1956. The organisers of the event decided to form an organisation that would provide an ongoing programme to unite women and deal with women's issues. As a result, the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) was formed in December 1983 as one of the affiliates of the UDF. The first president was Pumzile Mlambo (later to become South Africa's first female Deputy President) while Hersheela Narsee was secretary. The following year Nozizwe Madlala took over as president and Victoria Mxenge was elected as secretary. However, a year later, while preparing for the Pietermaritzburg treason trial, Mxenge was murdered in her home.

The main aim of NOW was to fight for the upliftment of women. NOW drafted a constitution that would safeguard women's rights. Women were trained and encouraged to take up leadership positions in various fields.

NOW also campaigned for better housing at affordable rates, and was concerned with pass laws, the lack of proper maternity benefits and child-care. The establishment of NOW was a major factor in the increased role of women in political and civic organisations and in the establishment of the rights of women in the struggle and all spheres of society.

With the declaration of the 1986 State of Emergency and the mass detentions and restrictions on the UDF that followed, NOW activists, such as Florence Mkhize, found they were filling the leadership vacuum in Natal and spearheaded a number of UDF campaigns that the UDF itself could not carry out. It helped victims by providing shelter, food and moral support. From 1985 until it disbanded, NOW was focused on the violence that had erupted between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the UDF. The organisation was disbanded in 1990 and many of its members joined the ANC and the ANC Women's League.



The launch of the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) in 1984, Albertina Sisulu (centre) and executive members at the launch of the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW). Photograph by Omar Badsha.



FLORENCE MKHIZE

1932-1999

Florence Mkhize, widely known as 'Ma Flo', was born in Umzumbe on the South Coast of Natal. She became politically active from a young age. She joined the Congress Movement and became one of the most active women leaders in the anti-Apartheid struggle.

In 1952 she participated in the Defiance Campaign which led to her first banning order. Despite this she continued to communicate with her comrades through the sewing factory where she worked. Mkhize was also a founding member of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), working underground due to her banning order. In 1955, Mkhize was elected as a volunteer to participate in the writing of the Freedom Charter. On her way to Kliptown her bus was stopped by the police and sent back. Mkhize also became involved in organising FEDSAW's Women's

Day March in 1956. On her way to the rally her bus was once again sent back by the police. After the banning of the ANC, she continued in the struggle as a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and as an organiser of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) until these structures were also banned.

During the 1970s, Mkhize led the 'Release Mandela' Campaign in Natal. In the 1980s she led the people of Lamontville township in Durban during the education and housing crisis. Mkhize was also a founding member of the UDF and worked with the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) in an attempt to get support from women from all racial groups.

In 1998, Mkhize received the Bravery Award from the ANC Women's League in appreciation for her work in the struggle. She also received a Military Gold Medal from Nelson Mandela at the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) Veterans Conference in 1999. On 10 July 1999, Mkhize died of heart failure.

THE FEDERATION OF TRANSVAAL WOMEN, 1984

FEDTRAW was formed on 8 December 1984 in celebration of the formation of its mother body, the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). The women worked together on issues such as high food prices, high rents, the conscription of white young men into the army and inadequate child-care facilities. FEDTRAW also focused on the plight of rural women.

FEDTRAW decided to adopt the Women's Charter as a working document as the demands of women at the time were the same as when the Charter was drafted in 1955. Sister Bernard Ncube was elected as first President of the federation, while Albertina Sisulu, Rita Ndzanga, Francis Baard and Maniben Sita were elected as active patrons. Helen Joseph and Winnie Mandela were non-active patrons.



SISTER BERNARD NCUBE

1932-

Sister Bernard Ncube was born in Johannesburg. She attended Roma College in Lesotho where she received a Diploma in Theology. In 1955 she entered the Companions Catholic Order and began teaching in Catholic schools in Johannesburg.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Sister Ncube helped form various local women's organisations in the Transvaal Region. In 1984 she was elected the President of FEDTRAW. Due to political activity she was detained six times under State of Emergency regulations. On one occasion she spent three months in solitary confinement. Due to international pressure she was released along with two other detainees. In 1986, Sister Ncube was part of a UDF delegation that met with President George Bush Snr. In August 1987, along with 12 other members of the Krugersdorp Residents Association, Sister Ncube was charged with plotting to overthrow the government. However, the charges were later dropped due to a lack of evidence.

In 1991 Sister Ncube became a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee, a position she held until 1997, and in 1994 she became a Member of Parliament, chairing the Committee on Arts and Culture, Science and Technology. In 2002 she became Mayor of the Westrand Metropolitan Council, Randfontein,. She is also the Co-ordinator of the Ministries Department of the Institute for Contextual Theology.



Sister Bernard Ncube with FEDTRAW members at the Welcome Home Rally for the released Robben Island leaders in Soweto. Source: Gille de Vlieg, African Media Online.



HELEN JOSEPH

1905-1992

Helen Joseph was born in Midhurst, Sussex in England. She graduated from Kings College London in 1927 and went to teach in Hyderabad, India. In 1931 Joseph came to South Africa. During World War II she returned to England to serve as information and welfare officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and decided to become a social worker.

After returning to South Africa, Joseph took a job with the Garment Workers Union (GWU) in 1951. Joseph was also a founding member of the South African Congress of Democrats (CoD), an organisation of whites which was affiliated to the ANC. She was also a founder of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in 1954 and was its national secretary for a time. With the leadership of FEDSAW, she spearheaded a march of 20 000 women to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 to protest against pass laws. Joseph was subsequently arrested and charged with high treason in December 1956 and banned in 1957. She was the first women to be placed under house arrest in 1962 and survived several assassination attempts. She was diagnosed with cancer in 1971 and her banning orders were lifted but reinstated for two years in 1980.

During the 1980s, Joseph was instrumental in reviving the women's movement within the country and was often called on to be a keynote speaker at anti-Apartheid rallies. Joseph gave speeches on the history of resistance organised at various campuses by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and was given the position of Honorary Vice President of NUSAS. In 1983, when the UDF

was launched she was elected Honorary Patron, as her listing meant she could not hold an executive position, and participated in many UDF events. In 1984 she gave the opening speech at the formative conference of FEDTRAW and was named a non-active patron. Joseph died on 25 December 1992 and her funeral was conducted by Archbishop Desmond Tutu with the eulogy was delivered by Nelson Mandela.



Helen Joseph, secretary of the Federation of SA Women, arrives at the Treason Trial, Drill Hall Court, 9 January 1957. Source: Museum Africa.

TRADE UNIONS: COSATU, 1985

There was an unprecedented level of resistance in factories and black communities in the 1980s over economic and political issues. In fact, it was a period in which the highest level of strikes in South African history was recorded. In 1982, an average of a thousand black workers a day went on strike and this trend continued to increase. Industrial action was undertaken against the background of low wages and discriminatory labour practices.

After four years of unity talks between unions who were opposed to Apartheid and struggled for a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa, COSATU was formed on 2 December, 1985. Emma Mashinini, an active trade unionist from the 1940s, was a driving force in bringing together various unions under COSATU. At the time of its establishment COSATU had more than 462 000 members organised in 33 unions, and by 1991 this number had grown to more than 1 258 800. The activities of COSATU became closely linked to the wider liberation struggle.



A delegation of women from the Food and Allied Workers Union participate in the Congress of South African Trade Unions cultural day in Johannesburg in July 1987. Source: Jeeva Rajgopaul.



EMMA MASHININI

1929 -

Emma Mashinini was born in Johannesburg on 29 August 1929. In the 1930s, she and her family were forcibly removed to Orlando in Soweto. She started working in a clothing factory where she worked her way up and was later elected to the National Executive Committee of the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), the highest body of the Garment Worker's Union. She remained a member of the committee for the next 12 years.

In 1975 Mashinini founded the Commercial, Catering and Allied Worker's Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) and became its President. By 1977, her union had 1 000 members.

Mashinini was arrested in November 1981 under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act and spent the next six months in solitary confinement at Pretoria Central Prison. After her release, despite advice to go into exile, she resumed her post at CCAWUSA for another four years.

In 1985, she was involved in the formation of the Congress of South African Trade unions (COSATU), a body that united trade unions across the country. After resigning from CCAWUSA she was appointed Director of the Anglican Church's Department of Justice and Reconciliation. In the early 1990s she became the President of the Mediation and Conciliation Centre in Johannesburg and in 1995 was appointed Commissioner for the Restitution of Land Rights.



Emma Mashinini at a trade union meeting at Khotso House in Johannesburg in 1983. *Photograph by Cedric Nunn.*

BLACK SASH IN THE 1980S

In 1955 The Women's Defence of the Constitution League was formed by a small group of white, middle-class, predominantly English speaking women to protest the Separate Representation of Voters Bill which aimed to remove 'coloureds' from the general voters roll. When the Bill was passed the organisation continued to protest against legislation that infringed the rule of law. The organisation grew into an avenue for liberal white women to oppose the government. The organisation was nicknamed the 'Black Sash' which referred to the black sashes that members draped over their right shoulder during protest marches.

From the mid-1970s, under the presidency of Sheena Dun-

can, the Black Sash began to focus on the destructive pass laws. The Black Sash became concerned with the monitoring of pass law courts to expose injustices and set up Advice Offices to assist in various parts of the country. Problems handled by these offices included employer/employee issues, unemployment insurance and pensions. The Sash, as it was sometimes known, worked with a number of organisations in the 1980s including the UDF, FEDSAW and the End Conscription Campaign.

After the 1994 elections, the Black Sash shifted focus from being a protest organisation to become a professional one, still upholding the same principles of making submissions to government in shaping legislation and advising on welfare.



MOLLY BLACKBURN

1930-1985

Molly Blackburn was born in Port Elizabeth (P.E.) into a political family – her father, Elgar Bellhouse Pagden, was active in the Progressive Party in P.E. Blackburn graduated from Rhodes University, Grahamstown, with a BA Degree. After graduating she taught in London and lived in Belgium before returning to South Africa.

On her return to P.E., Blackburn joined the Black Sash as she felt she could no longer take a back seat to the violence, poverty and political injustice that faced black South Africans. However, she soon left Black Sash due to its inactivity at the time. In 1981, Blackburn won the provincial seat for the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) to represent P.E. in the Cape Provincial Council. However, Blackburn was often

critical of the party as it mainly focused on issues faced by whites.

In 1982, Black Sash opened an advice in P.E. and Blackburn rejoined the organisation. She was approached by Matthew Goniwe to officially inquire about the rent restructuring in the Lingelgile township near Cradock. Together with Goniwe and three others – Sicelo Mhlawuli, Sparrow Mkhonto and Fort Calata – who later became known as the Cradock Four - Blackburn assisted in setting up the Cradock Residents Association. When the Cradock Four were abducted in June 1985, Blackburn became involved in finding the missing men. When their bodies were later found she led an inquiry into their deaths at the hands of the Security Police.

Together with long time friend, Di Bishop, Blackburn was instrumental in getting the National Party to start an enquiry into the Langa shootings that took place on



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A definition of Apartheid

During the 1980s hundreds of thousands of black South Africans were forced to move and were dumped in remote rural areas called Bantustans or 'homelands'. These forced removals mainly affected women.

Source A

Black people were forced to move to the Bantustans, and dumped in the middle of nowhere with inadequate facilities. Millions of people were moved by the police and the army to live in a new place, often places they had never seen before. "This thing came so sudden upon us ... when they came to us, they came with guns and police ... we had no choice... the guns were behind us... they did not say anything they just threw our belongings in. There is nothing to say or the gun is through your head. We did not know, we still do not know this place... and when we came here they just dumped our things, so that we are still here. What can we do now? We can do nothing."

A woman describing being moved to a resettlement camp

Source B

"The policy of separate development is designed for happiness, security and stability".

A South African supporter of Apartheid

The role of the Black Sash

White women, like those in the Black Sash, also participated in the struggle against Apartheid.

Source A

"Black Sash members themselves were arrested, taken into detention, kept under surveillance and harassed ... The establishment of the United Democratic Front in 1983 brought together a number of organisations in a concerted push to exert pressure for change. In 1985 and then 1986 the beleaguered state introduced a State of Emergency. Once again many voices were silenced. Black Sash members, the majority of whom had a measure of protection as white, middle-class women, felt the responsibility of still having a degree of political freedom to speak out. They added to the wedge of pressure forcing the pace of change ..."

From: www.blacksash.org.za

Questions:

Read Source A and B and answer this question:

If you were a woman who was forced to move during the 1980s, how would you have described Apartheid in one sentence? Begin your sentence with: "The policy of Apartheid is"

Read Source A, and answer these questions:

a) Why do you think white women joined the struggle against Apartheid?

b) Why do you think white women had a 'measure of protection' from the Apartheid state?

21 March 1985. Her involvement in such issues led her to be seen as a troublemaker by members of the National Party. Blackburn received numerous death threats and was arrested on several occasions.

On 28 December 1985, while traveling back from Oudtshoorn with Judy Chalmers, her sister and Di and Brian Bishop, they were involved in a collision. In the collision both Blackburn and Brian Bishop were killed. Her funeral, on 2 January 1986, was attended by 20 000 people.



Family of detained youth ask Black Sash members Di Bishop, Audrey Coleman and others for help. In 1985, when Molly Blackburn and other Black Sash members entered the Uitenhage Police Station, they discovered young people tied to table legs while being beaten by policemen. Source: Gille de Vlieg, African Media Online.