

A celebration of heroic women

ALBERTINA NONTSIKELELO SISULU

She is 66, a mother ~~xxxxxxx~~ and grandmother. She has spent about half her adult life under banning orders which drastically restrict her life and control her social and political activities.

For the past twenty years, since her husband, Walter, was sentenced to life imprisonment, she has worked to support her own five children, together with two more of her deceased sister; and as the years went by, to help care for her grandchildren.

Albertina was born in the Transkei and trained as a nurse and midwife. ~~xxxxxxx~~ From the time of their formation, she was active in the ANC Women's League (formed in the 1940s) and the Federation of South African Women (formed in the 1950s) She was elected to the first committee of the Women's Federation.

In 1963, together with her 16-year-old son, Max, Albertina was arrested and held in solitary confinement under the 90-day law, in an attempt to ~~xxx~~ elicit information on the whereabouts of her husband; he was in hiding at the time, prior to his arrest.

In 1964 she was issued with her first 5-year banning order. When this expired, the ban was renewed for a further 5 years, together with a house-arrest order that permitted her to go out to work on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., but confined her to her home in Orlando, Soweto, every night, and all day at weekends and holidays. The banning orders are very strict, prohibiting visitors, attendance at any gathering (not just political, but any coming together of friends, or even to go to church). Banning orders operate as a form of imprisonment which the victim has to impose on herself. In 1974 she received her third banning order; her fourth, issued in July 1979, permitted her to go to church for the first time in 15 years, and the house arrest order was lifted. She was, however, for the next two years, still confined to Johannesburg, could not enter a school or factory nor take part in social gatherings, and had to apply for special permission to visit her husband on Robben Island (He has been transferred to Pollsmoor, together with Nelson Mandela.)

This banning order expired in July, 1981, and under a declared 'less stringent' policy of the apartheid regime, was not immediately ~~renewed~~ renewed.

In August, 1983, at the historic formation of the new United Democratic Front in Cape Town, Albertina Sisulu was elected as one of three Presidents of the new organisation, to the joyful enthusiasm and applause of the delegates. It was a significant tribute to her steadfast courage and commitment.

Almost immediately after that, she was arrested while working at the Soweto surgery of Dr Asvat. "She was calm as always," Dr Asvat said. "She does not show her emotions."

What are the crimes with which she is charged, and for which she is held in prison, without bail?

The regime alleges that in January, 1983, at the funeral of Mrs Rose Mbele in the Holy Cross Church, Orlando, Mrs Sisulu (and Mr Mali, harged with her), sang songs praising the aims of the ANC, its activities and leaders. The charges are further divided into as many 'sub-charges' as possible, for each of which she and Mr Mali can receive separate prison sentences. They are *that they*:

- * distributed pamphlets or stickers
- * displayed ANC flags
- * draped the coffin of the deceased with an ANC flag (these two constitute separate charges.)
- * distributed pieces of paper in the ANC colours and wore the same as mourning ribbons
- *praised the deceased for furthering the aims and objectives of the ANC
- * created sympathy and support for the ANC, its leaders, officials, or members; and
- * conspired with each other, and with other persons to commit, bring about, or perform any of the above mentioned.

A police video film of the funeral was shown in court. The magistrate said it clearly showed a woman in ~~front~~front of the church holding a plastic bag and distributing something to people entering the church. The case has been adjourned until the new year.

Throughout all these years of suffering and sacrifice, Albertina Sisulu has displayed the immense strength, the steadfast purpose, of South African women. She has supported her large family on her own, brought up and educated all the children, and cared for seven grandchildren. Her daughter Lindiwe is in exile after being detained for 11 months, assaulted and tortured, following the Soweto uprisings. Her son Zwelakhe, a well-known journalist and President of the Media Workers' Association, has also been detained and imprisoned. Her husband remains incarcerated in apartheid prisons.

Albertina Sisulu exemplifies the women's cry: When you strike a woman, you have struck a rock!

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