

# **FREE NELSON MANDELA**



**July 18 1978 his 60th birthday**

# NO EASY WALK TO FREEDOM

For Nelson Mandela, imprisoned in South Africa's notorious Robben Island, July 18 — his 60th birthday — will be but one more day in his lifelong struggle to free his people from apartheid. But for the international community it should be a day which symbolises the courage and determination of the black people of South Africa to overthrow apartheid.

Nelson Mandela, leader of South Africa's liberation movement — the African National Congress — was sentenced to life imprisonment at the Rivonia Trial in June 1964. He was found guilty of planning acts of sabotage and making preparations for guerrilla warfare against the apartheid state.

Mandela explained his actions with these words from the dock:

**"It was only when all else failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form Umkhonto We Sizwe. We did so not because we desired such a course, but solely because the Government left us with no other choice."**

The Rivonia Trial attracted widespread international attention. The United Nations Security Council, at a special meeting in June 1964, called for the release of the defendants. In Britain the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Ramsey, said:

**"The men were guilty of sabotage and other offences against the law as it exists, but their actions were the outcome of conscience, and wherever in the world there is respect for conscience and hatred of the policy of apartheid, there will be understanding of Mr Mandela's words that he acted from 'a calm and sober assessment of the situation after many years of oppression and tyranny of my people by the whites'. If he is guilty before the existing law, the guilt before heaven belongs to the policy which the law is designed to enforce. The ideal and practice of apartheid is a denial of God's law of the relation of man to man as, irrespective of colour, created in the image of God."**

In South Africa itself the African National Congress President and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Chief Albert Luthuli, warned:

**"In the face of the uncompromising white refusal to abandon a policy which denies the African and other oppressed South Africans their rightful heritage — freedom — no one can blame brave men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods; nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organised force in order to ultimately establish peace and racial harmony.**

**"For this, they are to be sentenced to be shut away for long years in the brutal and degrading prisons of South Africa. With them will be interred this country's hopes of racial cooperation. They will leave a vacuum in leadership that may only be filled by bitter hate and racial strife."**

These prophetic words were fulfilled in the blood of the young students of Soweto in June 1976, for whom Mandela and other imprisoned leaders were a constant source of inspiration.

Since Mandela's arrest in August 1962 he has been in continuous detention or imprisonment; his life sentence means life, for there is no remission for South Africa's political prisoners. Conditions on Robben Island are arduous. Mandela himself is in a small group kept separate from his fellow prisoners. All political prisoners are effectively denied news from the outside world, and now the prison authorities are denying all political prisoners the right to study beyond matriculation level.

Nelson Mandela has been a key figure in South Africa's liberation struggle since the early 1940s. An attorney by profession, he was a founding member of the African National Congress Youth League. In 1952 he was the 'Volunteer-in-Chief' during the Defiance Campaign. Then, in 1956, he was charged with 155 others in the 'Treason Trial'. The charges arose from the adoption of the *Freedom Charter* at the Congress of the People in 1955. The *Freedom Charter*, the apartheid state argued, was High Treason.

Its preamble states:

**"We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:**

**that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people."**

After a trial lasting five years, all 156 were acquitted.

Following the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, Mandela played a key role in the founding of Umkhonto We Sizwe, which was to become the armed wing of the African National Congress. This marked a turning point in the history of the liberation struggle — a recognition of the inevitability of armed confrontation, a struggle which the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly endorsed in December 1977.

Since Mandela's imprisonment his wife, Nomzamo Winnie, has sought to continue the struggle to which he dedicated his life. She has been detained, tried, acquitted, then retried and acquitted, banned and constantly harassed by the security police. Currently she is banished to a remote location in the Orange Free State.

The fate of Nelson Mandela and all South Africa's political prisoners must be of concern to the whole world. There can be no real change and certainly no peace whilst the true leaders of South Africa are imprisoned and detained. Much has been done to keep alive the name of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and other Robben Island prisoners. But more must be done: individuals, trade unions, student organisations, churches, political parties, indeed every group, and — most important of all — governments can act: why don't you start now—

- Send a birthday card to Nelson Mandela for his 60th birthday  
c/o Robben Island Prison  
off Cape Town  
Republic of South Africa**
- Send a message of greetings to Nomzamo Winnie Mandela at  
802 Brandfort Location  
PO Brandfort 9400  
Orange Free State  
Republic of South Africa**
- Urge the Government to act to secure the release of Nelson Mandela  
and all South African political prisoners and detainees**
- Contribute to the International Defence and Aid Fund at  
104 Newgate Street, London EC1**
- Join the campaign to free all South African political prisoners**

*On July 18 there will be a special meeting in London in the Grand Committee Room at the House of Commons at 7.30 pm to mark Nelson Mandela's 60th birthday, jointly organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the International Defence and Aid Fund, in cooperation with the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid.*

This publication is a contribution to International Anti-Apartheid Year and is published by the Anti-Apartheid Movement in association with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid

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