

Ma Sisulu Memorial Lecture

We are dedicating it to Mama Albertina Sisulu under the theme “100 Years of Albertina Sisulu: Women United in Moving South Africa Forward”.

This year’s programme coincides with the triple centenaries of the birth of Nelson Mandela, Albertina Sisulu and the formation of the Bantu Women’s League.

We are mobilising society in order to build partnerships that will decisively address key issues facing women and girls, particularly gender-based violence, women’s economic empowerment, access to land, harmful practices and other sectoral issues in the context of the National Development Plan (NDP) and our Manifesto commitments.

MaSisulu who is a founder member of the UDF (United Democratic Movement) and Fedsaw (Federation of South African Women), led the struggle on many fronts. in the height of repression characterized by bannings, arrests and killings she emerged steadfastly and filled the void that was left by the forceful exiling and imprisonment of leaders like Mandela, Tambo and others.

In her leadership role she gave guidance to young activists and leaders of progressive organizations including COSAS, SAYCO, AZASO, civic formations and many women's organization throughout the country. She

did not only give political guidance but she was also a mother figure to all activists.

It was a combination of these two qualities, political and parental roles that made it possible for her as a leader of the UDF to sustain a concerted rejection of the tri-cameral apartheid parliamentary system by all South Africans.

She inspired a generation of leaders who have since swelled the ranks of the democratic movement and our government. To us she has left huge footprints that tracks our history of suffering, and resilience under immeasurable harassment and dehumanization under apartheid.

As South Africans we owe it to this pedigree of revolutionaries who defined the course and tempo of our struggle. Indeed we can without equivocation say that as South Africans, we today enjoy the freedom and democracy because of her selfless contribution.

Her selflessness and unwavering commitment to the women's struggle is discernable in the various positions she held, with distinction, in both the ANC and the ANCWL.

Mama Sisulu was undoubtedly one of the most accomplished courageous women leaders who championed the struggle against apartheid. She fought tirelessly to break the disempowering gender divide in our society and contributed through her entire life to the noble fight against racial segregation and class exploitation.

She was one of the key people who served on a committee that re-established the ANCWL, after the unbanning of the ANC in 1990. Mama Sisulu was elected to the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) in 1991.

Youth

Mama Sisulu was the only female delegate at the official launch of the ANC Youth League on the 10th of September 1944, and therefore partook in deliberations that shaped South Africa's militant, radical and revolutionary youth wing of the ANC.

The ANC Youth League has already picked up the spear of a fallen Heroine and will continue with the fight for total political, social and economic emancipation through transfer of wealth from the minority to the majority. On the gender equity front, the ANC Youth League can now proudly say that all our structures are constituted by a minimum of 50% females, and they draw inspiration from Mama Albertina Sisulu.

Workers

She served in many, many positions, including Deputy President of the Women's League and she led the United Democratic Front delegation that went overseas on an anti-apartheid mission in the late 1980s. She was also one of the founding trustees of the Labour Job Creation Trust, set up by the three trade union federations after the Presidential Jobs Summit in 1998.

She played a major role in the development, transformation and unification of the nursing profession and the health sector in general, and in the founding of the COSATU-affiliated union, the Democratic Nurses Union of South Africa (DENOSA). She formed DENOSA a union whose mission includes unifying and organising nurses under one umbrella. She literally, steered the ship in the right direction in a consultative conference in 1992 that led to formation of DENOSA.

For this she was given a trophy at the historic International Nurses Congress held in Durban in 2009, in recognition of an outstanding contribution to nursing.

Justice Langa "She was the first woman to be held under the brutal 90-day detention order. And, her name is always included in a list of remarkable women: Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, Sophie de Bruyn, Dorothy Nyembe, Charlotte Maxeke, Ruth First, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Epainette Mbeki and Amina Cachalia. Many, like MaSisulu, marched on the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest pass laws and oppression.

Ma Sisulu remains a benchmark of what nursing, leadership and motherhood should be. She was a revolutionary in her own right. We are very grateful to be enjoying the freedom that she has sacrificed for. We will remember Ma Sisulu for her selflessness and dedication and remember the support she gave to all South Africans.

As the saying goes, behind every successful man, there is a very good woman. We would not have got the leadership from Walter Sisulu had it not been for the pillar of strength that stood beside him in the form of Ma Sisulu.”

She was a second recipient, after Nelson Mandela, of the SACP highest honour the Chris Hani Peace Award, uMama Albertina Sisulu, a great revolutionary and patriot of our people.

Mama Sisulu was an overall activist and understood the relationship between racial oppression, class oppression and gender oppression, especially the most unrealised aspects of the gender struggle.