

- Two weeks after their 1979 wedding anniversary, the security police arrived to serve Mama Sisulu with another banning order; this time it was a two-year ban.
- Fortunately in July 1981, much to her surprise, Mama Sisulu's banning order was not renewed.
- She had been banned for 18 years, the longest any person in South Africa had been banned.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS

- With her banning order finally lifted, Mama Sisulu could finally actively and openly set about work on rebuilding women's organisations.
- During this period she was also inundated with requests to speak at meetings and rallies.
- She worked closely with veteran activists like Greta Ncapayi, June Mlangeni and Sister Bernard Ncube.
- In 1981 she was involved in a campaign against the government's plan to hold elections for the South African Indian Council.
- During 1981 Mama Sisulu also spoke at many public gatherings condemning the apartheid state's policy of detentions without trial.
- On 15 June 1982, she was served with her fifth banning order.
- Her banning order was cut short due to the introduction of the new Internal Security Act of 1982.
- On 24 February 1984, she was sentenced to four years in prison, two of which were suspended for five years.
- Throughout this period, she campaigned for the release of Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu so that there could be genuine democratic negotiations.

PARLIAMENT AND RETIREMENT

- Following the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, Mama Sisulu worked on a committee that re-established the ANCWL.
- On 9 August 1990, she and other women from exile set up the first ANCWL branch in Durban.
- In April 1991, she was nominated to stand for election as president of the ANCWL but she withdrew in favour of Mama Gertrude Shope.
- In 1991 Mama Sisulu was elected to serve on the ANC's National Executive Committee.
- In April 1994, the Sisulu family observed the transition of South Africa following its first democratic elections.
- In 1998 she celebrated her 80th birthday, while still working as a Member of Parliament.
- At the end of 1999, she and her husband left Parliament for the last time and retired from politics.
- Mama Sisulu has been bestowed with various awards and honours for her courageous lifelong struggle for human rights and dignity.



ALBERTINA SISULU

Centenary

2018

ALBERTINA SISULU FACTSHEET

EARLY LIFE AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

- Mama Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu was a nurse, political and community activist, and also one of the high-profile leaders of anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa.
- She was born on 21 October 1918 into the Thethiwe family in Xolobe village in the Tsomo district of the Transkei, in the Eastern Cape.
- In 1926 she began primary school in Xolobe village where she was a model student. Her commitment earned her a bursary to complete her high-school education at the prestigious Mariazell College in Matatiele.
- In 1944 she attended the ANCYouth League Conference, the only woman to do so.
- In 1948 she joined the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) and in the 1950s she began to assume a leadership role – both in the ANC and in the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW).
- Both Mama Sisulu and her husband, Walter Sisulu, were jailed several times for their political activities, and she was constantly harassed by the notorious Security Police.
- She became the first woman to be arrested under the General Laws Amendment Act, which allowed a police officer to detain without warrant a person suspected of a politically motivated crime for up to 90 days without access to a lawyer.
- In 1958 Mama Sisulu was among the hundreds of women who were arrested in Johannesburg for marching in protest against new pass laws.
- In 1963 she was again arrested a few months after her husband went underground.
- In 1983 she was arrested and detained in solitary confinement. She was charged with furthering the aims of the ANC at the funeral of ANC activist Rose Mbele, and she was subsequently sentenced to four years in prison.

 #MaSisulu100

 <https://www.gov.za/masisulu100>

A Woman of Fortitude



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



- In 1983 Mama Sisulu was elected co-president of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and in June 1989, the government finally granted her a passport.
- She then led a delegation of UDF leaders to Europe and the United States.
- She met the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and American President George Bush Snr.
- In October 1989, the last restrictions on the Sisulu family were lifted and Mr Sisulu was released from Robben Island.
- In 1994, Mama Sisulu served in the first democratically elected Parliament of South Africa.
- Mama Sisulu, her husband and son, Zwelakhe, have won numerous humanitarian awards.
- On 2 June 2011, she passed on at her Linden home in Johannesburg, aged 92.

NURSING

- In 1940, she trained as a nurse at the then Johannesburg General Hospital (now Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital).
- Mama Sisulu led a very frugal lifestyle and hardly left the nurses' residences.
- In 1944 she qualified as a nurse and got married to Walter Sisulu.
- It is also in Johannesburg that she experienced racism for the first time.
- Mama Sisulu was shocked at the way junior white nurses would order black nursing sisters around, as she had never been exposed to such prejudice before.
- Six months into her nurses' training, she witnessed blatant racism and discrimination against black patients who were admitted to the hospital after a horrific accident at Park Station, Johannesburg's central bus and train terminus.
- The 'non-whites' section of the hospital was swamped with patients and the senior black medical staff appealed to the white hospital authorities to allow black patients to be treated in the 'whites-only' wards but they refused.
- This incident had a profound effect on Mama Sisulu as she could not believe that medical practitioners would violate their duty and deny the best possible care to patients on the basis of their skin colour.
- Another tragic memory that Mama Sisulu associates with the then Johannesburg General Hospital is the death of her mother in 1941. The hospital refused to grant her leave to attend the funeral in Xolobe.
- In 1954, she obtained her midwifery qualification and was employed by the City Health of Johannesburg as a midwife.
- The job was challenging as Mama Sisulu, like the other black midwives, had to travel on foot to visit her patients in townships.

POLITICAL AWAKENING

- The ANC only began accepting women as members at its 1943 conference and in 1948 the ANCWL was formed.
- Mama Sisulu joined the ANCWL and this was the beginning of her life as a political activist.
- In 1949 she supported her husband's election as the first full-time Secretary-General of the ANC.

- The Defiance Campaign of 1952 catapulted the ANCWL into a new era of action, resulting in the emergence of a new breed of women leaders who later formed the FEDSAW.
- The Women's Charter was adopted at the inaugural conference, which was attended by 150 women from all over South Africa.
- During the early stages of the FEDSAW, Mama Sisulu actively committed to promoting the ideals of the federation as an ordinary member.
- When visiting patients at their homes, she would distribute FEDSAW pamphlets and encourage the women to join the federation.
- In 1955, FEDSAW was actively involved in the ANC's boycott of Bantu Education and Mama Sisulu provided support in preparation for the boycott.
- Mama Sisulu's home became an alternative school as her children had been withdrawn from their government schools because of the Bantu Education system.
- The apartheid state responded by making it illegal to run alternative schools and it announced that it would shut down all boycotting schools permanently.
- Several Christian schools decided to continue as private schools rather than being placed under the control of the Department of Bantu Education, and Mama Sisulu and her husband decided to send their children to a private Seventh-Day Adventist School, despite the considerable financial burden this would place on them.

BANNING ORDERS AND DETENTION

- Mama Sisulu was held in detention following the Rivonia Raid in July 1963.
- She became the first woman to be arrested under the General Laws Amendment Act (for 90-days detention).
- During solitary confinement the security police psychologically taunted her with the intent of gaining information on her husband's whereabouts.
- In order to visit her husband at Robben Island, Mama Sisulu was forced to apply for a passbook as no-one was allowed to visit the island without one; a process which was humiliating for her.
- Mama Sisulu was served with a five year banning order until 31 July 1969, which limited her movement and activities.
- This meant that for five years Mama Sisulu was not allowed to leave the magisterial district of Johannesburg.
- Mama Sisulu's banning order prevented her from visiting all compounds where black people lived.
- She was also prohibited to visit any factory, newspaper or magazine office, university, school, college or educational institution.
- She was not allowed to be involved with the compilation, printing or distribution of any publication.
- Mama Sisulu was banned from attending social, political or student gatherings.
- In July 1969, exactly five years after her first banning order, the State informed Mama Sisulu that her banning order had been renewed for another five years under partial house arrest.
- The renewed banning order made it almost impossible for her to network with FEDSAW and the ANC members as she was under partial house arrest.
- She had to apply for special permits to attend work-related lectures outside of Orlando from the Chief Magistrate of Johannesburg.