

CELEBRATING MANDELA

It was on 11th June 1964 that Nelson Mandela and his co-accused were “found guilty” of plotting to overthrow the apartheid Regime and from then Mandela became the world’s most famous prisoner who paradoxically has come to epitomize “the struggle” and “freedom” inspite of the fetters of Robben Island before Polsmoor. His co-accused were Walter Sisulu, Andrew Mlangeni, Elias Motsoaledi, Raymond, Mhlaba, Rusty Bernstein (acquitted) Denis Godberg (released on 28th February, 1985 and now living in Britain) and Govan Mbeki (released on 5th November, 1987 and living under strict, harsh and inhuman restrictions in Port Elizabeth, South Africa), all the others are still serving life sentences.

One interesting aspect of these prisoners is that inspite of the torment, torture and agony of prison life none of them have died even though their average age is about 68 infact Walter Sisulu is now 76. When Govan Mbeki a septuagenarian was released in 1987, the world expected to see a “sobered maybe covered older man who should be retired from the struggle, but alas an articulate, stout proponent for armed struggle who restated, no regrets nor recantation for the actions sequel to their incarceration more than two decades earlier thus the clampdown on him by the Apartheid authorities in South African. Some people have attributed the longevity of these prisoners to an insurmountable will to survive prison and ultimately to witness a free South- Africa.

On 18th July 1988, Nelson Mandela will celebrate his 70th Birthday. The British Anti-apartheid Movement (BAAM) is organizing “the Nelson Mandela Freedom at 70 Campaign”, An All star concert in collaboration with the BBC at Wembley stadium to galvanize action for the release of Mandela before the 18th of July.

It is expected that anti-Apartheid Movements all over the world including our own dear NAACAP will have contributions to make in ensuring what the build-up of event will eventually climax with opening the Gates of Folsmo to unconditionally free Mandela and his co-accused at Robben Island. But in celebrating Mandela a lot more is invoiced than braking down prison walls, this is because of the symbolism of the Mandela spirit. The all conquering mind, which has failed and refused to be broken inspite of the rigour and toll on such a cerebral personality by severe prison conditions. A revelation of some of these restrictions will be a vindication. Do you know that: Mandela is allowed to receive only 52 letters a year of not more than 500 words each and to send out the same; he is allowed to receive and send out 12 birthday cards a year and to receive and send out 12 Christmas cards. He is allowed only 30 visitors over a period of 12 months, each staying for 40 minutes. And there his “luxuries” end. For one with expansive responsibility towards the movement he co-founded, the ANC and the entire peoples of South Africa, it is obvious that the luxuries, by their sparsity emphasis the deprivation. But Mandela remains unbowed.

Never before have the advocates for the freedom of Mandela been spurred by as a more romantic and sentimental urge like present drive to ensure that Mandela

celebrates 70 as a free man, never before have the agitators set a date on a day, and indeed it ought to be so, for this prisoner has become romanticized because of the way his will and strength have affected mankind and the true essence of freedom. For in refusing to accept a compromised freedom he gave freedom its true meaning; In refusing to accept "True Freedom" anywhere outside his fatherless he defined patriotism; In refusing to recant his belief, he showed strength and heroism in his pursuit to become a barrister (he is already a Solicitor) even-while in prison he has given a new dimension to determination. It is no news that the lifelong romance between him and Winnie is the stuff Donise Robins and Mills and Boons novels are made of.

Celebrating Mandela!! For too long, much too long, Mandela's name has been the stimuli for fiery speeches, but from 11th June when the series of international events by the Anti- Apartheid Movements commence with the Wembly Stadium All-Star Concert, the musicals will be heralding celebration time, something that has not been associated with Mandela's name for a long time. Too Long!

We are celebrating Mandela and his co-accused. The chant is no Longer "FREE MANDELA" but "FREE MANDELA NOW". The best face saving devise for PRETORIA is to given Mandela freedom, his type of freedom as a Birthday present.

Pretoria is lucky, time has taken its toll and given them and excuse, Pretoria does not deserve this type of auspicious excuse, Howbeit it is an opportunity they cannot afford to lose. FREE MANDELA NOW!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU NELSON MANDELA!

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