

"Kathy" Kathrada :

Lieutenant of Nelson Mandela

AHMED MOHAMED ("Kathy") Kathrada, now serving a sentence of life imprisonment with Nelson Mandela, symbolises the firm alliance of the African and Indian people in the struggle against the vicious racist system in South Africa.

Kathrada was born on August 21, 1929, in a scholarly family of Gandhians in a small town in Transvaal. Moving to Johannesburg for his schooling, he came under the influence of Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and the Cachalia brothers (Maulvi and Yusuf), leaders of the freedom movement, and began political work at the age of 12, handing out leaflets at street corners and doing other volunteer jobs for the movement.

In 1946, when the South African Indian Congress launched the Passive Resistance Movement against the "Ghetto Act", Kathy, then only 16, gave up his schooling to do full-time work in the office of the Passive Resistance Council. He was one of the 2,000 volunteers imprisoned in that campaign and served a month in a Durban jail. He was a foundation member of the Transvaal Indian Volunteer Corps and then of its successor, the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress, of which he was soon elected President. As the alliance between the African and Indian Congresses developed, he came into close contact with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, J.B. Marks and other African leaders. He worked tirelessly to promote joint action as a leader of the Youth Action Committee co-ordinating the youth wings of the African, Indian and other Congresses.

In 1951, while a student at the Witwatersrand University, he was sent by the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress as a delegate to the World Youth Festival in Berlin and was elected leader of the large multi-racial South African delegation. He then spent nine months at the headquarters of the World Federation of Democratic Youth.

Immediately after returning to South Africa, Kathy plunged into the organisation of the "Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws", launched jointly by the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress, in which nine thousand people of all racial origins courted imprisonment. He was given a suspended sentence of nine months.

In 1954, the racist regime served banning orders prohibiting him from attending any gatherings and from membership in 39 organisations. But he refused to be intimidated.

In 1955 when Indian schools in Johannesburg were moved out of the city to a segregated location of Lenasia, some 22 miles away, he helped organise the Indian Parents' Association which established the Central Indian High School in Johannesburg, and was elected secretary of the Association. In the same year, he also helped organise the great multi-racial "Congress of the People" which proclaimed the "Freedom Charter".

Kathrada was arrested in December 1956, in the nation-wide swoop of 156 leaders of the freedom movement, and went through the marathon treason trial until March 1961. Even during the trial, he continued political activities: the regime restricted him to Johannesburg in 1957 and detained him for five months in the State of Emergency after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Evading partial "house arrest" for 12 hours a day imposed in December 1962, he went underground and was arrested with other leaders of the underground movement in July 1963. That was his 18th arrest on political grounds.

He was tried with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and other leaders and was sentenced to life imprisonment in June 1964. They were charged with organising and directing the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* ("Spear of the Nation"), the military wing of the African National Congress, in 1961. Kathy Kathrada proudly admitted his membership in *Umkhonto*. He has refused several offers of conditional release from prison.

Sechaba, the organ of the African National Congress, wrote some years ago: "Kathy has been described as 'brave as a lion' and 'absolutely fearless'. Even at the moment of his arrest at Rivonia, he laughed and joked. With his vitality, intelligence and open contempt for the sham of South African 'justice', he made mincemeat of the prosecutor at the Rivonia Trial. Serving a life sentence on Robben Island, he remains the same Kathy, according to those who have seen or visited him there."

In February last year, one of the buildings of the Polytechnic of Central London was named "Kathrada House" in honour of Ahmed Kathrada.

Those who wish to convey their appreciation and solidarity to him may write to:

Kathrada Family
P.O. Schweizer Reineke
Transvaal, South Africa

E.S. Reddy