



one day we will ... and 'One day we shall ...'. That happily-ever-after day never came for my grandparents, my mom, and my aunts and uncles. The children suffered the most, and ultimately the consequences of forfeiting a stable family life for his meals was a sacrifice that my grandfather just had to make peace with.

My grandfather always reminded us that we should never forget our past or where we come from. The democratic society that both my grandparents and their comrades fought for was achieved after a lot of suffering and loss of life. This book is a reminder that we could easily go back to that place of hatred, but it also shows that personal resilience can overcome unendurable situations. From day one in prison, my grandfather resolved that he would not break or waver; instead he would insist that he and his fellow prisoners be treated with dignity. In a letter to my grandmother in 1969, he recommends she boosts her spirits by reading psychologist Norman Vincent Peale's 1952 bestseller *The Power of Positive Thinking*. He writes: 'I attach no importance to the metaphysical aspects of his arguments, but I consider his views on physical & psychological issues valuable. He makes the basic point that it is not so much the disability one suffers from that matters but one's attitude to it. The man who says: I will conquer this illness & live a happy life, is already halfway through to victory.'

This inspirational outlook sustained my grandfathers' unwavering pursuit of justice and an equal society for all South Africans, and is one that I think can be applied to many of life's challenges.

This collection has answered many of the questions that used to baffle me: How did my grandfather survive twenty-seven years in jail? What kept him going? Through his words we can find the answers.

Zamaswazi Dlamini-Mandela

## INTRODUCTION

**A** raft of draconian regulations governing the writing of letters by South African political prisoners and their random implementation by mean-spirited guards was designed to control the most precious aspects of a prisoner's soul – their contact with loved ones and news of the outside world.<sup>1</sup>

After political prisoners were sentenced in court, they were assigned to the prison where they were supposed to serve their punishment. In Nelson Mandela's case, his life as a condemned prisoner began in Pretoria Local Prison after he received a five-year sentence on 7 November 1962 for leaving the country without a passport and inciting workers to strike. Already a prisoner, he was brought back to court on sabotage charges in 1963, and on 12 June 1964 he received a lifelong sentence. His wife, Winnie Mandela, visited him in Pretoria that day, and hours later, without warning, he and six of the seven comrades sentenced with him were taken from Pretoria for the long flight in a military aircraft to the notorious prison on Robben Island. They arrived on a bitterly cold winter morning on 13 June 1964. Unlike inmates who had committed 'common law' crimes like rape, robbery, and assault, who were classified as C Grade and sometimes B Grade on arrival, political prisoners were assigned to D Grade, the lowest possible classification with the least privileges. They were allowed only one visitor every six months and were entitled to write and receive only one letter of five hundred words every six months. So unpredictable was the process of sending and receiving letters that six years after he was imprisoned, Mandela met with his lawyers on Robben Island and listed examples of 'unreasonable and vexatious behaviour and conduct of the authorities'. He said that the disruptions to his correspondence, 'indicate a deliberate intention and policy on the part of the authorities to cut me off and isolate me from all external contacts, to frustrate and demoralise me, to make me despair and lose all hope and eventually break me.'<sup>2</sup>

Later on, when the censors tired of counting words, they began accepting letters of a page and a half.<sup>3</sup> Letters to their lawyers and prison authorities did not come from their quota. Saturdays and Sundays were earmarked for visits, and letters were delivered on a Saturday. Prisoners could give up a

visit in exchange for the receipt of two letters. Initially, both visits and correspondence had to be with 'first degree relatives'. Prisoners were forbidden from mentioning other prisoners in their letters or from writing about prison conditions or anything the authorities may have construed as being 'political'.<sup>4</sup> Every letter went through the Censor's Office on Robben Island, where incoming and outgoing mail was checked.<sup>5</sup> Decades later, Mandela recalled:

They didn't want you to discuss things other than family matters and especially when they were considered by them to be of a political nature. And that was the reason, that you must confine yourself purely to family matters. And then there was ignorance of language. If you used the word 'war', it doesn't matter what context, they would say, 'Take it out' because they didn't understand the language very well. And war is war; it can't have any other meaning. If you said the 'war of ideas', then you had said something you were not supposed to say.<sup>6</sup>

In his book about the fifteen years he spent as a prisoner on Robben Island, in the same section as Mandela, Eddie Daniels paints a picture of the 'frustration' of arbitrary, incompetent, and 'vindictive' censoring and holding back of letters.<sup>7</sup>

Conditions began to improve slightly from 1967, arguably due to the intervention of Helen Suzman – an opposition member of Parliament to whom Mandela reported 'a reign of terror' on the Island. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the prisoners' own efforts also contributed to these changes. They were then allowed to write and receive one letter every three months and be visited every three months.<sup>8</sup>

A prisoner was supposed to remain in a category of privileges for two years, meaning that after six years D Grade prisoners would be in A Grade, with the most privileges. Mandela, however, remained in D Grade for ten years. We can see from his letters, where he sometimes wrote his grade (the prisoners also referred to this as a 'group'), that he was in B Grade in 1972 and finally received A Grade designation in 1973, allowing the writing and receiving of six letters each month.<sup>9</sup>

Before being upgraded, a prisoner had to have their behaviour assessed by the prison board, which conducted discussions with prisoners that Mandela said were for the purposes of 'victimising' political prisoners.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the relentless censoring by bureaucrats, Nelson Mandela the prisoner became a prolific correspondent. He copied down his letters in notebooks to aid him with rewriting them when the censors refused to send them unless he removed certain paragraphs or when letters went missing

in transit. He also liked to keep a record of what he'd said to whom. Jailed from 5 August 1962 until 11 February 1990, he wrote hundreds of letters. Not all of them, however, reached their destination in one piece. Some were censored to the extent that they became unintelligible, others were delayed for no reason, and some were not sent at all. Some he managed to smuggle out in the belongings of prisoners being released.

Prisoners were rarely informed if a letter remained unsent and usually discovered this if a recipient complained of not having received a letter. It is not known, for instance, whether all the letters he wrote to Adelaide Tambo under the guise of various nicknames reached her in London where she was living in exile with her husband, Oliver Tambo, president of the African National Congress (ANC) and Mandela's former law partner. The letters were likely intended for both of them. We do know from fellow prisoner Michael Dingake that Mandela had 'demanded the right to correspond with O. R. Tambo and exchange views on the liberation struggle.'<sup>11</sup>

A father of five young children when he was first taken into prison, Mandela was not allowed to see his children until they were sixteen years old. Letters became a vital tool of his parenting.

In an official letter of complaint to officials twelve years into his imprisonment, Mandela wrote, 'I sometimes wish science could invent miracles and make my daughter get her missing birthday cards and have the pleasure of knowing that her Pa loves her, thinks of her and makes efforts to reach her whenever necessary. It is significant that repeated attempts on her part to reach me and the photos she has sent have disappeared without trace whatsoever.'

The most painful of Mandela's letters is the series of 'Special Letters' in addition to his quota, written after the deaths of his beloved mother, Nosekeni, in 1968, and of his firstborn, his son Thembi, a year later. Forbidden from attending their funerals, he was reduced to consoling his children and other family members in letters through this harrowing time, and writing to thank senior family members for stepping up and ensuring that his mother and son got the send-offs they deserved.

A lawyer by profession, Mandela habitually used the written word to press officials to uphold prisoners' human rights, and on at least two occasions he wrote to officials demanding that they release him and his comrades.

Dingake described Mandela's role in prison from the early 1960s as that of a 'battering ram'.<sup>12</sup> In the face of 'atrocious' conditions, he could not be ignored, 'not only because of his status, but because he would "not let them do it"'.<sup>13</sup> His relentless campaigning for prisoners' rights eventually broke down the resolve of the authorities to have each prisoner raise their complaints individually.<sup>14</sup> Mandela 'defiantly continued to describe general

conditions' in his letters to the commissioner of prisons, and the rest of the prisoners began laying personal complaints 'at every opportunity'. It was 'impossible', Dingake writes, for guards to record the 'complaints from every single one of more than a thousand inmates'.<sup>15</sup> The rule was 'repealed by practice' and individuals or groups from each section in the prison were allowed to speak on behalf of all the prisoners.<sup>16</sup>

During his discussions and in letters to government officials in the late 1980s, Mandela urged for the release of his comrades. See for instance his letters to the commissioner of prisons dated 11 September 1989 (page 545) and 10 October 1989 (page 556). Finally Mandela's efforts bore fruit when the remaining five men sentenced with him to life were freed on 15 October 1989. (Denis Goldberg had been freed in 1985 and Govan Mbeki in 1987.) He walked out of prison less than four months later.

Nelson Mandela has left us a rich archive of letters documenting his twenty-seven years in prison, which echo his anger, his self-control, and his love for family and country.

## A NOTE ON THE LETTERS

Nelson Mandela's prison letters are not housed under one roof, and compiling this book has taken almost ten years. These letters have been drawn from various collections: Mandela's prison files held by the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, the Himan Bernadt Collection, and the collections of Meyer de Waal, Morabo Morojele, Fatima Meer, Michael Dingake, Amina Cachalia, Peter Wellman, and Ray Carter. Letters are also taken from the Donald Card Collection, named for the former security policemen who in 2004 returned to Mandela the hardcover notebooks in which he copied his letters before he handed them in for posting. Both the Himan Bernadt Collection and the Donald Card Collection are held by the Nelson Mandela Foundation. The books were taken from his cell in 1971, and he complains about this in a letter to authorities on 4 April 1971. For a list of where the individual letters are housed, see page 600.

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa houses by far the majority of Mandela's prison letters. Encased alongside other official paperwork in string-tied bundles assembled in cardboard folders, they fill some fifty-nine boxes. The letters represent the Prisons Department's record of letters he wrote and received. In some cases the originals remain as evidence that they were never sent.

Since most of these letters are copies of the originals, their legibility depends on the way in which they were photocopied, the paper used, and how the ink has faded over time. Some letters are missing words that have been left off the sides during photocopying by prison officials or sliced out of the paper during censoring. In the case of some of the letters, we will never know exactly what Mandela wrote.

Heartbreakingly, a long and loving letter to his youngest daughter, Zindziswa, still neatly folded in its plain white envelope, was found in his prison archives nineteen years after his release from prison. It was accompanied by a note from a prison official who wrote that Mandela was not allowed to send a letter with a Christmas card. Written on 9 December

be heard by a prison official and I ask that you demand trial by a magistrate. I will be able to raise the funds to cover your fees.<sup>1</sup>

Yours faithfully,  
[Signed NRMandela] (NELSON MANDELA)

oooooooooooo

This letter marks the first salvo in what turned out to be a long, drawn-out war with state officials over attempts to have Mandela disbarred as an attorney. In the first attempt the authorities relied on his 1952 conviction under the Suppression of Communism Act,<sup>2</sup> a law to outlaw the Communist Party of South Africa from 1950. Its secondary role was to taint all opponents of apartheid as Communists and thereby punish and at least neutralise them. On 2 December 1952 Mandela and nineteen others were convicted for their participation in the 1952 Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws, commonly known as the Defiance Campaign. It was a creation of the ANC and the South African Indian Congress as a popular initiative to highlight six of the laws the National Party created after it won power in 1948 and brought in the policy of apartheid.

Looking back some twenty-five years later, while in conversation with American writer Richard Stengel, Mandela remembered being defended at no charge by Walter Pollak, then the Chair of the Bar Council. The court dismissed the application of the Law Society on the ground that to be convicted for your political convictions does not make a person who is unfit to be a lawyer.<sup>3</sup>

The second attempt turned on his conviction for sabotage, essentially in terms of a certain section of the Internal Security Act. On that occasion, Mandela decided to conduct his own defence and demanded to be let off hard labour to prepare his case. I wanted tables, chairs, proper chairs, proper lighting for me to prepare the case. I also wanted to be taken to Pretoria where the case was going to be heard, so that I could have access to the library.<sup>4</sup>

After much correspondence, the case was withdrawn. The prison authorities had refused Mandela's demand to be let off the back-breaking work in the lime quarry from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays, they didn't want to provide better food to aid his concentration, and they would not transfer him to Pretoria for the duration of the case.

'Throughout my imprisonment, when I threatened to go to court, they pulled back. They didn't mind me briefing a lawyer, they didn't mind me getting

<sup>1</sup> During his incarceration, Mandela received financial support from people such as the British newspaper publisher David Astor (1912-2001) and Lady Elinor Binley and her husband Sir Robert Binley (1903-82), the former headmaster of Eton College and at the time the visiting professor of education at the University of the Witwatersrand.  
<sup>2</sup> For the Suppression of Communism Act, see the glossary.

a lawyer to argue my case, but when I said I don't want a lawyer, I want to appear in court myself, they did not want that, and they pulled back; he said. 'Because they were afraid of the publicity?' Stengel enquired.  
'Yes. They wanted the people to forget about me as much as possible.'<sup>46</sup>

To Joel Carlson,<sup>1</sup> his attorney

[Note in another hand] 466/64 Nelson Mandela

letter to attorney<sup>ii</sup>

Mr J Carlson  
PO Box 8533  
Johannesburg

[Stamp dated 1967]

Dear Sir,

On 19th June 1967, about an hour after my interview with you, a member of the security staff handed me a letter, signed by the Liquidator appointed in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act (Act No 44 of 1950),<sup>iii</sup> drawing my attention to a judgment delivered on 2.12.52 by Justice Rumpff in the Witwatersrand Local Division. In the opinion of the Liquidator the findings and verdict in this case were conclusive of my having contravened Section 11(b) of the above act. Copy of the aforementioned judgment was attached. On the basis of this judgment he proposed to include my name on the list of office-bearers, members or active supporters of the Communist Party of South Africa, and he invites me to make representation within 30 days from the date of the letter (i.e. from 23.5.67).

I am instructing you to handle this matter on my behalf. I would have preferred a personal interview with you. In fact the same day I received the Liquidator's letter, I wrote to the Commanding Officer and asked him to telephone urgently, and at my expense, to ask you to return to the Island for a consultation on this matter, but permission to communicate with you was granted only yesterday. I cannot give you proper instructions by correspondence and I should be pleased if you would kindly arrange a consultation. I assume that it will not be possible for you to come down and I should, therefore, be pleased if you would kindly instruct your Cape Town corre-

<sup>i</sup> Joel Carlson (1926-2001) - see the glossary.  
<sup>ii</sup> This note indicates that this is a special letter which will not come off his quota.  
<sup>iii</sup> For the Suppression of Communism Act, see the glossary.

spondent, Mr Brown of Frank, Bernadt & Joffe to see me. I should further be pleased if you would communicate with the Liquidator and advise him that you are now handling the matter.

Yours faithfully,

[Signed NRMandela]  
NELSON MANDELA

P.T.O.

The judgment relied upon by the Liquidator is the one where I was convicted with 19 others for the part we played in organising the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws.  
[Initialled NRM]

To the liquidator, Department of Justice

[Stamped 23 October 1967 by the Robben Island prison reception office]  
The Liquidator  
Department of Justice,  
Pretoria.

Sir,

Re: Communist Party of South Africa

I have received your letter of the 23rd May 1967 to which you attach copy of a judgement delivered on the 2nd December 1952 by the Honourable Justice Rumpff in the Witwatersrand Local Division of the Supreme Court in which case I was one of twenty accused.

You state that the findings and verdict in that case were in your mind conclusive of my having contravened Section 11 (b) of Act No. 44 of 1950 as charged.<sup>1</sup>

Finally you advise that I may submit to you further representations in this regard.

At the outset, I wish to reiterate the statement I made in previous

<sup>1</sup> The Suppression of Communism Act, Section 11(b) states that there will be penalties for any person who 'advocates, advises, defends or encourages the achievement of any such object or any act or omission which is calculated to further the achievement of any such object', the object being communism.

correspondence with you that I have never been an officer-bearer, officer, member or active supporter of the Communist Party of South Africa. I further deny that my conviction in the above case entitles you to include my name in the list of persons who were members or active supporters of the Communist Party and I will strenuously contest any efforts on your part to do so. It is my firm belief that the allegation that I was a member or active supporter of the Communist Party is an act of persecution and a propaganda manoeuvre intended to distort my political beliefs and to justify the removal of my name from the roll of attorneys. It is not in any way inspired by any honest belief that I am a Communist. A study of the correspondence in this matter confirms my view.

In your letter of the 1st July 1966, you advised me that the Minister of Justice had in terms of subsection (10) of section 4 of Act No 44 of 1950 directed you to complete a list of persons who were or had at any time before or after the commencement of the said Act been office-bearers, officers, members or active supporters of the Communist party which was by subsection (1) of section 2 of the said Act declared to be an unlawful organisation. In that letter you further advised me that evidence had been placed before you that I had been a member and active supporter of the said Communist Party. You then afforded me opportunity, in terms of section 4, to show why my name should not be included in the abovementioned list.

In my letter of the 15th July 1966, I emphatically denied that I was a member of the Communist Party. I pointed out that since you had given me no particulars in regard to this allegation, I could do no more at that stage than merely to make a bare denial. I accordingly asked you to furnish me with full particulars of such evidence as had been placed before you. Your reply of the 27th July 1966 stated expressly that sworn evidence had been placed before you to show that I had been a member [of] the Communist Party since 1960 and that I had taken part in its activities, inter alia, by attending conferences of the said Party. On the . . . [sic] August I wrote and asked you to furnish me with detailed particulars. After a silence of almost four months, I received your letter of the 15th December 1966 in which you informed me that it had been decided not to include my name in the list of office-bearers, officers, members or active supporters of the Communist Party at that stage. No reference whatsoever was made to my letter of the . . . [sic] August 1966 and the particulars I had asked for.

Five months thereafter you wrote me your letter of the 23rd May 1967 and confronted me with a completely new allegation. Now it was proposed listing me because of my conviction in December 1952 for contravening section 11(b) of the above Act. The original allegation that I was a member of the Communist Party since 1960 was abandoned and I was deprived of

the opportunity of clearing my name by publicly demonstrating its falsity. Now it was maintained by inference, that I had been such a member since 1952. If it is seriously contended that the 1952 judgement made me a member or active supporter of the Communist Party, why then was it necessary to proceed against me on the ground that I had been a member since 1960?

It is my contention that the first allegation was abandoned simply because it was from the beginning untrue and because the particulars I asked for could not be supplied. I contend further that the fact that it has taken fifteen years before proceedings were started to list me suggests that throughout this period, the above conviction was not considered to have put me in the category of persons who were members or active supporters of the Communist Party. I feel obliged to point out that the proposal to include my name in the said list is an act of victimisation and has nothing whatsoever to do with the fulfilment of duties imposed by section 4 of the above Act.

As more fully appears from the copy of the judgement attached to your letter of the 23rd May 1967, I and nineteen others were sentenced for the part we played in organising the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws. The Campaign was organised and directed by a National Action Council which was composed of representatives of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress, and was based on the principles of non-violence which were adopted by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru in India. It was a protest against certain selected apartheid legislation which we considered harsh and unjust. The actual demonstrations were peaceful and disciplined and it was because of this consideration that the Learned Judge decided to suspend sentence [*sic*]. The Campaign had nothing whatsoever to do with Communism. Its object was to secure a redress of the just and legitimate grievances of the African, Indian and Coloured people of this country.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, of the twenty accused in the above case, ten had already been listed under the above Act when they were convicted on the 2nd December 1952, all of them having been members of the Communist Party before it was dissolved in 1950. Of the remaining ten, with the exception of myself, I am not aware of any proceedings that have been taken to list any one of them because of the above conviction. I have been singled out and treated differently from my co-accused in that case, some of whom held, at the time, more senior positions in the political organisations than I did. The only inference I can draw from this differential treatment is that in my case the above conviction is considered to have made me a member or active supporter of the Communist Party, whereas

the same conviction carries no such implications as far as the rest of the accused were concerned.

Even in my case for fifteen years after the conviction, it was apparently not deemed necessary to put my name on the list. Only now that I am a prisoner serving a life sentence was it considered expedient to do so. I am forced to the conclusion that in making the original allegation advantage was being taken of my disabilities as an incarcerated person and it was apparently thought that I would consequently be unable to contest the allegation. It is my considered opinion that resort is now being made to the 1952 conviction for the purpose of saving face.

In any event the Communist party was dissolved in 1950 shortly before Act no 44 of 1950 was promulgated and was re-formed only in 1953. This information was given to me by Messrs Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba<sup>ii</sup> and Elias Motsoaledi<sup>iii</sup> all of whom are prisoners serving life sentences in Robben Island. Mr Mhlaba informs me that up to June 1950 when the Communist Party was dissolved at a Conference held in Cape Town, he was secretary of the Port Elizabeth District of that body, and that he attended the dissolution conference. Mr Motsoaledi, who was at that time Group's Secretary in Johannesburg, confirmed Mr Mhlaba's statement. Mr Mbeki who, prior to his arrest in July 1963, was a member of the Port Elizabeth District Committee, informs me that a new Communist Party was formed in 1953 and bore the name South African Communist Party. There was thus no Communist Party between June 1950 and 1953. I could, therefore, not be a member or active supporter of an organisation that did not exist. I accordingly submit that the above conviction does not entitle you to include my name in the list of persons who were members or active supporters of the Communist Party.

The case of R V Adams 1959 (1) S.A. 646 (Special Court), which is popularly referred to as the Treason Trial,<sup>iv</sup> and in which I was one of the accused, is relevant. The Crown, as it then was, alleged a conspiracy to overthrow the existing state by violence and to replace it with a Communist state. The indictment, as far as I can remember, covered the period of 1st December 1952 to December 1956, and included a count under Act no 44 of 1950. Amongst the bodies that were involved in this case were the African National

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Govan Mbeki (1910-2001), MK activist and Rivonia trialist who was imprisoned with Mandela - see the glossary.  
Raymond Mhlaba (1920-2005), MK activist and Rivonia trialist who was imprisoned with Mandela - see the glossary.

Elias Motsoaledi (1924-94), trade unionist, ANC member, and Rivonia trialist who was imprisoned with Mandela - see the glossary.

The Treason Trial (1956-61) was a result of the apartheid government's attempt to quell the power of the Congress Alliance, a coalition of anti-apartheid organisations. In early-morning raids on 5 December 1956, 156 individuals were arrested and charged with high treason. By the end of the trial in March 1961 all the accused either had the charges withdrawn or, in the case of the last twenty-eight accused (including Mandela), were acquitted.

Congress and the South African Indian Congress, the same organisations that organised the Defiance Campaign' in 1952. I was one of the witnesses that were called for the defence, and who were cross-examined by counsel for the Crown. The verdict was given on the 29th March 1961 when all the accused were acquitted. The reasons for judgement were handed in about a month thereafter. I never saw any report, official or otherwise, of the reasons for the judgement. But I read press reports according to which it appeared that the same Justice Rumpff who convicted me on the 2nd December 1952, and on whose judgement you now rely, made observations which seemed to indicate that he did not consider me to be a Communist. If this be correct, then I contend that such a finding would be conclusive of the fact that I was not, during the period covered by the indictment, a member or active supporter of the Communist Party.

As far as the question of my political beliefs is concerned, I have always regarded myself, first and foremost, as a nationalist, and I have throughout my political career been influenced by the ideology of African nationalism. My one ambition in life is, and has always been, to play my role in the struggle of my people against oppression and exploitation by whites. I fight for the right of the African people to rule themselves in their own country. Although I am a nationalist, I am by no means a racialist. I fully accept that principle stated in the report of the Joint Planning Council of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress which is quoted on page 5 of the judgement attached to your letter of the 23rd May 1967 that all people irrespective of the national group they may belong to, are entitled to live a full and free life on the basis of the fullest equality.

I have read Marxist literature and I am impressed by the idea of a classless society. I am firmly convinced that only socialism can do away with the poverty, disease and illiteracy that are prevalent amongst my people, and that maximum industrial development is the result of central planning and the nationalisation of the key industries of the country. But I am not a Marxist. As far as South Africa is concerned, I believe that the most immediate task facing the oppressed people today is not the introduction of a workers' government and the building of Communist society. The principal task before us is the overthrow of white supremacy in all its ramifications, and the establishment of a democratic government in which all South Africans, irrespective of their station in life, of their colour or political beliefs will live side by side in perfect harmony.

<sup>i</sup> Initiated by the ANC in December 1951, and launched with the South African Indian Congress on 26 June 1952 against six apartheid laws, the Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws (known as the Defiance Campaign for short) involved individuals breaking racist laws such as entering premises reserved for 'whites only', breaking curfews, and courting arrest. Mandela was appointed national volunteer-in-chief and Manlivi Cachalia as his deputy. Over 8,500 volunteers were imprisoned for their participation in the Defiance Campaign.

The one organisation which appeared to me best suited to undertake the task of uniting the African people, and that would eventually win back our freedom, was the African National Congress. I joined it in 1944 and in 1952 I became its Transvaal president and Deputy National President. In 1953 I was served with a notice in terms of the above Act calling upon me to resign from the African National Congress and never again to take part in its activities. It was formed in 1912 to strive for the liberation of the African people. Throughout its history it was inspired by the idea of African nationalism. In 1956 it adopted the Freedom Charter<sup>1</sup> a policy document which embodies the principles upon which the African National Congress will build a new South Africa. At the Treason Trial the Crown alleged that the Charter was a blue-print for a Communist state and called expert evidence to substantiate the allegation. On the other hand, the defence contended that the Charter was not a Communist document, but that its terms embodied the demands of a movement of national liberation. Amongst the evidence led by the defence to refute the allegation made by the prosecution was an article which I had written in the monthly magazine *Liberation* of June 1956 in which I posed precisely this same question, namely, whether the Charter was a blue-print for a Communist state.<sup>ii</sup> In that article, I had endeavoured to show that, apart from the clauses dealing with the nationalisation of mines, banks and other monopolies, the Charter was based on the principle of free enterprise, and that when its terms were implemented, capitalism amongst Africans would flourish as never before. In the press reports referred to above, Mr Justice Rumpff was reported to have expressly referred to this article and relied partly on it in holding that the Crown had not proved the allegation that the Charter was a Communist document. The African National Congress is a nationalist, and not a Marxist organisation, and, unlike the Communist Party whose membership is open to all national groups, it is an organisation exclusively for Africans.<sup>iii</sup>

Although it is not a Marxist organisation, the African National Congress had often co-operated with the Communist Party on matters of common concern. Such cooperation became possible because the Communist Party supported the liberation struggle of the African people. Instances of such cooperation between national movements and Marxist parties are to

<sup>i</sup> A statement of the principles of the Congress Alliance (see the glossary), adopted at the Congress of the People in Kliptown, Soweto, on 26 June 1955. The Congress Alliance rallied thousands of volunteers across South Africa to record the demands of the people. The Freedom Charter espoused equal rights for all South Africans regardless of race, land reform, improved working and living conditions, the fair distribution of wealth, compulsory education, and fairer laws. It was a powerful tool used in the fight against apartheid.

<sup>ii</sup> The article Mandela wrote for the publication is headlined 'In Our Lifetime'. In it, he writes: 'Whilst the [Freedom] Charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature it is by no means a blue-print for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis.' *Liberation: A Journal of Democratic Discussion* was sold for one shilling.

<sup>iii</sup> The ANC opened its membership to non-Africans in 1969.

be found all over the world. For example, in the struggle for national independence in India, the All-India National Congress Cooperated with the Communist Party of India.

Communists have always been free to join the African National Congress and many of them are members, and some of them even serve on its national, provincial and local committees. Inside the African National Congress, and in my political work generally, I have worked closely with Communists, especially Messrs Moses Kotane,<sup>i</sup> J.B. Marks<sup>ii</sup> and Dan Tloome.<sup>iii</sup> It is easy to understand why Communists are admitted as members of the African National Congress when one takes into account the fact that this organisation is not a political party but a political organisation in which various shades of opinion are permitted. It is a parliament of the African people. Just as there are Communist Parliamentarians in France, Italy and other western countries, so do we find Communists in the membership of the African National Congress. But the cooperation referred to between the Communists mentioned above and me has been limited to such matters as I considered to be within the framework of the policy of the African National Congress or as furthered the general struggle against racial oppression. But in no way have Communists, either as an organisation or as individuals, exercised any control over my political beliefs or activities nor did I, at any time, support their objects or programme.

Before I was banned in 1953, I had also taken part in the activities of the South African Peace Council,<sup>iv</sup> of which I was one of the vice-Presidents. The Reverend D.C.Thompson was at the time, its national chairman and its object was the preservation of world peace. It ran specific campaigns centering around the question; as for example the campaign to induce the Five Big Powers to conclude a Pact of Peace. It was not a Communist movement but Communists like Messrs A. Fischer,<sup>v</sup> A.M. Kathrada, and Miss Hilda Watts,<sup>vi</sup> served on its committees! In 1953 the Minister of Justice ordered me to resign from the Council.

In March 1961 I was the main speaker at an All-in African Conference which was held at Pietermaritzburg. The Conference had been called

<sup>i</sup> Moses Kotane (1905-78), ANC member and secretary-general of the South African Communist Party.  
<sup>ii</sup> J. B. Marks (1903-72), ANC member and a leader in the 1952 Defiance Campaign (for the Defiance Campaign, see the glossary).

<sup>iii</sup> Dan Tloome (1919-92), ANC and South African Communist Party member who spent decades in exile in Zambia where he rose to leadership positions in the ANC and served as the official chairman of the South African Communist Party.

<sup>iv</sup> Established in the 1950s, the South African Peace Council promoted peace both in South Africa and internationally and ran campaigns against the development of the atomic bomb, the militarisation of South Africa, the rearming of Germany, and the wars in Korea and Kenya.

<sup>v</sup> His lawyer: Abram (Bram Fischer) - see the glossary.

<sup>vi</sup> Hilda Bernstein (née Watts) (1915-2006), author, artist, and anti-apartheid and women's rights activist. She was a founding member of the South African Peace Council and of the Federation of South African Women. After her husband, Lionel (Ruter), was acquitted in the Rivonia Trial, they crossed into neighbouring Botswana on foot.

to protest against the decision of the Government to establish a Republic without consulting Africans. The Conference was attended by Africans from various walks of life - sportsmen, churchmen and politicians. A resolution was adopted demanding that the Government call a national Convention of all South Africans, black and white, to draw up a new democratic constitution for the country. The resolution called for mass demonstrations on the 29th, 30th and 31st May 1961 if the Government failed to summon the Convention. I was the Honorary Secretary of the Conference and took the lead in organising the general strike on the eve of the declaration of the Republic. A year later I was convicted and sentenced to three years imprisonment for organising this strike, and I have been in jail ever since. There was nothing in the Conference that was Communistic nor could it be argued that the above resolution advocated an object of Communism.

I played a leading role in the formation of Umkhonto weSizwe in November 1961 which planned and directed the acts of sabotage in this country. The formation of Umkhonto was the direct result of the policy of the Government to rule the country by force, a policy which made all forms of constitutional struggle impossible. The Communist Party was represented on the National High Command, the governing body of Umkhonto. But its representatives formed a minority and did not in any way direct its policy.

Early in January 1962 I left the country to attend the conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement for Central, East and Southern Africa which was to be held in Addis Ababa in February that year. This was a conference of African nationalists called for the purpose of examining problems and of formulating plans for the liberation of the oppressed people in the Pafmeca' area. After the conference I toured Africa and visited England. I did not visit any of the Communist countries. In 1962 I was convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment for leaving the country without a passport.

A study of my political background demonstrates that I have never been a member or active supporter of the Communist Party of South Africa or of its successor, the South African Communist Party. On the contrary, that background shows that I am a nationalist. One ambition has dominated my thinking, my political beliefs and my political actions. This is the idea of exploding the myth of white supremacy and of winning back our country. The only body which has enabled our people to forge ahead in our freedom struggle in the past, and which will lead us to our final goal in the future is, and has always been, the African National Congress with its dynamic

creed of African nationalism. All my efforts to help advance the struggle of my people have been made through the African National Congress. If on occasions I served on other bodies it was because I considered that those bodies and their work helped to speed the liberation of the African people.

Finally, I deny that my conviction of the 2nd December 1952 entitles you to include my name in the list of persons who were members or active supporters of the Communist Party.

Yours faithfully

[Signed NRMandela]  
N.R. Mandela

To the registrar of the Supreme Court

[Typed]

Private Bag,  
ROBBEN ISLAND,  
CAPE PROVINCE.  
6th December 1967.

The Registrar of the Supreme Court,  
PRETORIA

Dear Sir,

Re: SECRETARY FOR JUSTICE vs NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA: APPLICATION FOR REMOVAL FROM THE ROLL OF ATTORNEYS. M 1529/1967

I have to advise that I am opposing the above application and it is my intention to attend the hearing in order to submit my argument in person. Formal notice of opposition will be filed in due course.

As indicated in paragraph 2 of [the] applicant's affidavit, I am at present serving a sentence of life imprisonment at Robben Island. The material that I require for [the] purpose of preparing the answering Affidavit and argument is located in the Transvaal Province, and it will be impossible for me to prepare the case from Robben Island.

It will be equally impossible for me to attend the hearing unless the prison authorities make the necessary arrangements for me to do so. I have accordingly written to the Commissioner of Prisons today requesting him to transfer me immediately to Pretoria for purposes of preparing the said Affidavit. I have further requested the Commissioner to make arrangements to enable me to attend the hearing.

In this connection I enclose copies of letters written to [the] applicant's Attorney and to the Commissioner respectively so that the court may be aware of my difficulties in this matter, I particularly wish to draw attention to the letter addressed to [the] applicant's Attorney in which I ask for an extension of the time within which I should file the Affidavit.

Should [the] Applicant's Attorney refuse my request I shall have no alternative but to apply to court for such an extension.<sup>ii</sup>

Yours faithfully,

[Signed Nelson R. Mandela]

*It is clear from correspondence in Mandela's prison files held by the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa, that he wrote on several occasions to Adelaide Tambo, the wife of his former long partner and the president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, who was living in exile with his family in London, and running the organisation from abroad. It is unlikely that Adelaide Tambo received the letters before the latter part of his prison sentence. In 1968 Mandela wrote to her care of his wife and used her African name, Matlala, and the surname Mandela. A note in Afrikaans at the end of one of the letters shows that the prison authorities had worked out the identity of the real recipient because someone has written 'A Tambo' on the letter. Just this information would have been enough for them to hold it back. It is highly probable that all the underlined text in this letter is the work of the prison censors, drawing attention to individuals that are known to them or whom they want to identify.*

<sup>i</sup> This text has been crossed out and signed by someone else.

<sup>ii</sup> In his response on 13 December 1967, J. H. du Toit agreed to extend until the end of March 1968, the period within which Mandela had to serve and lodge his answering affidavit. He added that this extension was 'subject to the court's approval'. Mandela signed this reply, acknowledging that he received it on 14 December 1967.

The relatives to whom funds could be sent were mentioned in Kgatho's letter.

On 8/3 I was due for a visit that did not come off. Who was it? Why did he not come? My funds have run out. Have received the *American Journal*.

Have you heard from Mary<sup>i</sup> & Paul<sup>ii</sup> about Sweet & Maxwell?<sup>iii</sup> I hear that my brother Regie<sup>iv</sup> [sic] is experiencing difficulties with the kids & that Malome<sup>v</sup> is ill. Can you elaborate?

Fondest regards to our friends Moosa & Maud!<sup>vi</sup> . . .

A family photo at last 'what a masterpiece'. Kgatho & sisters are terrific & it gave me such joy to see ma's photo. Your small picture almost created an upheaval. "Ayingo Nobandla lo!"<sup>vii</sup> vs this not her younger sister!<sup>ix</sup> "Madiba has been too long in jail, he does not know his sister-in-law," all these & other remarks were flung at me<sup>x</sup> from all directions.

To me the portrait aroused mixed feelings. You look somewhat sad, absent-minded & unwell but lovely all the same. The big one is a magnificent study that depicts all I know in you, the devastating beauty & charm which 10 stormy years of married life have not chilled. I suspect that you intended the picture to convey a special message that no words could ever express. Rest assured I have caught it. All that I wish to say now is that the picture has aroused all the tender feelings in me & softened the grimness that is all around. It has sharpened my longing for you & our sweet & peaceful home.

These days, my thoughts have wondered far & wide; to Hans St<sup>xviii</sup> where a friend would jump into a blue van & unburden herself of all the solemn vows that are due from fiancée to her betrothed & immediately thereafter dash across to an Olds on the opposite end of the block with vows equally sweet & reassuring; the skill with which she manipulated her evening 'studies' in Chancellor House<sup>xix</sup> & made it possible to receive & entertain old friends as soon as new ones proceeded to a boxing gym. All these have come back over & over again as I examine the portrait.<sup>x</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Democratic Progressive Party, the opposition party in Transkei which opposed apartheid rule -- see the glossary.

<sup>ii</sup> Mary Benson (1919-2000), friend, author, journalist, and anti-apartheid activist -- see the glossary.

<sup>iii</sup> Paul Joseph.

<sup>iv</sup> Bookshop in London from which Mandela ordered legal books for his studies.

<sup>v</sup> Oliver Reginald Tambo (1917-1993) - Mandela's friend, former law partner, and the president of the ANC - see the glossary. His middle name was Reginald and Mandela referred to him as Reggie.

<sup>vi</sup> 'Uncle' in isiXhosa.

<sup>vii</sup> Moosa Dinath and his wife Maud Katzenellenbogen. Mandela first met Moosa Dinath when he was a member of the Transvaal Indian Congress and businessman in Johannesburg. They renewed their acquaintance in prison in 1962 while Mandela was awaiting trial and Dinath was serving a sentence for fraud. He and Maud Katzenellenbogen, who befriended Winnie, hatched a plan to free Mandela from prison, but it was shelved after Winnie became suspicious of it.

<sup>viii</sup> "This is not Nobandla" in isiXhosa.

<sup>ix</sup> Winnie Mandela stayed at the Helping Hand Hostel in Hans Street, Jeppestown, when she moved to Johannesburg. Mandela is reminding her of when he would pick her up from there.

<sup>x</sup> Winnie would do her studies at Mandela's law firm in Chancellor House when he worked after hours.

<sup>x</sup> Nelson and Winnie Mandela met in 1956 and went on their first date on 10 March that year. They married on 14 June 1958 in Winnie's home town of Bizana. In a letter to Fatima Meer dated 14 June 1989, he wrote: "The

Finally Mhlope, I should like you to know that if in the past my letters have not been passionate, it is because I need not seek to improve the debt I owe to a woman who, in spite of formidable difficulties & lack of experience, has nonetheless succeeded in keeping the home fires burning & in attending to the smallest wants & wishes of her incarcerated life companion. These things make me humble to be the object of your love & affection. Remember that hope is a powerful weapon even when all else is lost. You & I, however, have gained much over the years & are making advances in important respects. You are in my thoughts every moment of my life. Nothing will happen to you darling. You will certainly recover and rise.

A million kisses & tons & tons of love.  
Dalibunga

NKOSIKAZI NOBANDLA MANDELA,  
HOUSE NO. 8115, ORLANDO WEST,  
JOHANNESBURG.

[15] Good luck to Kgatho in his exams & tell Mshana Nomfundo,<sup>i</sup> that I am glad to note that she is not discouraged. Let her remember that perseverance is key to success. I hope you managed to forward the letter to Cecil.

*Mandela ran his relationship with the prison authorities on the basis of respect seasoned with the wry observation that an ordinary guard made the difference between an extra blanket in winter or not. The basis of all these interactions, however, was the recognition of the humanity of the other, all the while being sure to maintain his own dignity and to protect his rights.*

*His many letters to the prison authorities for requests to see an eye specialist or a dentist, or pushing for more study rights, were not obligatory. Prisoners were presented every week with the opportunity of making complaints or requests to an officer. But, according to his comrade and fellow prisoner Mac Maharaj, while prisoners had an opportunity to make verbal requests, they were not given the opportunity to elaborate on them or provide any background information. Mandela probably wanted to keep a written record and at the same time was*

wedding party left Johannesburg at midnight on 12 June and reached Bizana the next day in the afternoon. As we were expected to reach the bride's place, Mbongweni, at dusk we spent some time at Dr Gordon Mabuya's place where he and his wife, Nontobeko, entertained us.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> One of Winnie Mandela's names.  
<sup>iii</sup> Mshama means 'niece' or 'nephew' in isiXhosa. He is referring to Olive Nomfundo Mandela, his niece.

*shrewdly managing each request for possible improvements from which the other prisoners may benefit.<sup>49</sup>*

*He also boldly wrote to senior officials and, in some cases, the minister of justice himself. Just less than five years into his prison sentence he wrote to the minister of justice demanding that he and his colleagues be released or treated as political prisoners according to rules of the Geneva Convention. His knowledge of the battles between the Afrikaners and the British colonial powers was brought to bear to support his arguments.*

*Comparing his plight and that of his fellow prisoners with the way in which the Afrikaner freedom fighters had been treated in jail, Mandela made a solid case for their freedom. But his captors were not the British; and the apartheid regime, which ran the country on force and oppression, was fearful that letting Mandela go would weaken it in the eyes of its supporters.*

To the minister of justice, c/o the commissioner of prisons

[Typed]

The Commissioner of Prisons,  
PRETORIA.

I should be pleased if you would kindly approve of the following letter to the Minister of Justice.

22.4.69  
The Minister of Justice,  
Parliament Buildings,  
CAPE TOWN.

Dear Sir,

My colleagues have requested me to write and ask you to release us from prison and, pending your decision on the matter, to accord us the treatment due to political prisoners. At the outset we wish to point out that in making this application we are not pleading for mercy but are exercising the inherent right of all people incarcerated for their political beliefs.

The persons whose names appear in schedule A attached to this letter live in the Single Cell Section of Robben Island Prison and are completely isolated from the rest of the prisoners on the Island. For this reason we are unable to furnish you with a full list of all the persons on this Island and in other prisons on behalf of whom this application is made.

Prior to our conviction and imprisonment we are' members of well-known political organisations which fought against political and racial persecution, and which demanded full political rights for the African, Coloured and Indian people of this Country. We completely rejected as we still do, all forms of white domination, and more particularly the policy of separate development, and demanded a democratic South Africa free from the evils of Colour oppression, and where all South Africans, regardless of race or belief, would live together in peace and harmony on a basis of equality.

All of us, without exception, were convicted and sentenced for political activities which we embarked upon as part and parcel of our struggle to win for our people the right of self-determination, acknowledged throughout the civilized world as the inalienable birthright of all human beings. These activities were inspired by the desire to resist racial policies and unjust laws which violate the principle of human rights and fundamental freedoms that form the foundation of democratic government.

In the past the governments of South Africa have treated persons found guilty of offences of this nature as political offenders who were released from prison, in some cases, long before their sentences expired. In this connection we refer you to the cases of Generals Christiaan De Wet, JCG Kemp and others who were charged with high treason arising out of the 1914 Rebellion.<sup>ii</sup> Their case was in every respect more serious than ours. 12,000 rebels took to arms and there were no less than 322 casualties. Towns were occupied and considerable damage caused to government installations, while claims for damage to private property amounted to R500,000. These acts of violence were committed by white men who enjoyed full political rights, who belonged to political parties that were legal, who had newspapers that could publicise their views. They were freely to move up and down the country espousing their cause and rallying support for their ideas. They had no justification whatsoever for resorting to violence. The

<sup>i</sup> The letter was typed by a prison official and the word 'are' rather than 'were' must have been typed by mistake.  
<sup>ii</sup> During World War I the British government called on its dominions to assist it. South Africa was specifically asked to fight against Germany in the neighbouring South West Africa. While Prime Minister Louis Botha supported Britain, a number of his generals did not and rebelled against the South African government.

leader of the Orange Free State rebels, De Wet, was sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment plus a fine of R4,000. Kemp received a sentence of 7 years and a fine of R2,000. The rest were given comparatively lighter sentences.

In spite of the gravity of their offences, De Wet was released within 6 months of his conviction and sentence, and the rest within a year. This event occurred a little more than half a century ago, yet the Government of the day showed much less intransigence in its treatment of this category of prisoner than the present Government seems prepared to do 54 years later with black politicians who have even more justification to resort to violence than the 1914 rebels. This Government has persistently spurned our aspirations, suppressed our political organisations and imposed severe restrictions on known activists and field workers.

It has caused hardship and disruption of family life by throwing into prison hundreds of otherwise innocent people. Finally it has instituted a reign of terror unprecedented in the history of the Country and closed all channels of constitutional struggle. In such a situation, resort to violence was the inevitable alternative of freedom fighters who had the courage of their convictions. No men of principle and integrity could have done otherwise. To have folded arms would have been an act of surrender to a Government of minority rule and a betrayal of our cause. World history in general, and that of South Africa in particular, teaches that resort to violence may in certain cases be perfectly legitimate.

In releasing the rebels soon after their convictions the Botha Smuts Government acknowledged this vital fact. We firmly believe that our case is no less different, and we accordingly ask you to make this privilege available to us. As indicated above, there were 322 casualties in the Rebellion.

By way of contrast, we draw attention to the fact that in committing acts of sabotage we took special precautions to avoid loss of life, a fact which was expressly acknowledged by both the trial Judge<sup>vii</sup> [and] the prosecution in the Rivonia case.<sup>viii</sup>

i At the time of Mandela's arrest, Umhonto weSizwe (MK), which was launched on 16 December 1961, had set off explosive devices after hours, to avoid loss of life, at locations including municipal and post offices, pass offices, a resettlement office, and an electricity substation. At that stage there was no loss of life.

ii 'Counsel for the defence successfully convinced the judge that MK – and therefore the defendants – was not responsible for all the acts of sabotage', wrote Kenneth S. Braun in *Striving Nelson Mandela: The Rivonia Trial and the Fate of South Africa* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012), p. 147. 'This fact was also acknowledged by the court during closing argument and lent support to another – perhaps even more important – point in the judge's failure to sentence them to death. No act of sabotage actually attributed to them or their organisations had resulted in death or injury to any person.' (Ibid.)

iii Attorney Joel Joffe wrote that his colleague Arthur Chaskalson showed that 'of the 193 acts of sabotage which the

An examination of the attached schedule shows that if we use De Wet's case as the standard, then every one of us ought to have been released by now. Of the 23 persons whose names are listed therein, 8 are doing life imprisonment, 10 are serving sentences ranging from 10 to 20 years, and 5 between 2 and 10 years.

Of those doing imprisonment for life, 7 have completed 4 years 10 months and 1 has done 4 years and 4 months. The man with the longest sentence amongst those serving terms between 10 and 20 years is Billy Nair<sup>i</sup> who has already completed ¼ of his sentence. Joe Gqabi,<sup>ii</sup> Samson Fadana and Andrew Masondo,<sup>iii</sup> the first to be convicted in this group have each completed 6 years of their respective sentences of 12, 8, and 13 years. The last men to be sentenced in the same group were Jackson Fuzile<sup>iv</sup> and Johannes Dangala who received 12 and 7 years respectively. Fuzile has completed a ¼ of the sentence whereas Dangala will have done exactly half of his on 19th May 1969. Every one of those serving terms between 2 and 10 years has at least completed ¼ of his sentence.

Our claim for release becomes even stronger when examined in relations to the cases of Robey Leibrandt,<sup>v</sup> Holm,<sup>vi</sup> Pienaar, Strauss<sup>vii</sup> and others. Leibrandt, a national of the Union of South Africa,<sup>viii</sup> arrived in the Union from Germany at a time when that country was at war with the Union. He then proceeded to set up a para-military underground organisation with the purpose of overthrowing the Government and establishing in its place one modelled on that of Nazi Germany. He was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death, later commuted to imprisonment for life. Holm, Pienaar and Strauss were also imprisoned for high treason, it

State had proved to have happened, only about a dozen had been proved legally<sup>v</sup> and 'not one involved any danger whatsoever to human life'. Joel Joffe, *The Stars vs. Nelson Mandela: The Trial that Changed South Africa* (London: One World Publications, 2007), pp. 238 and 239.

i Billy Nair (1929–2009), comrade and MK member who was charged with sabotage in 1963. He was held in B Section with Mandela on Robben Island and was released in 1984 – see the glossary.

ii Joe Gqabi (1929–81) was convicted of sabotage for MK activities and was imprisoned on Robben Island for ten years, for thirteen years.

iii Andrew Masondo (1936–2008) was convicted of sabotage for MK activities and was imprisoned on Robben Island for thirteen years.

iv Mxolisi Jackson Fuzile (1940–2011) was convicted of sabotage for his activities on behalf of the ANC and sentenced to imprisonment for twelve years.

v Sidney Robey Leibrandt (1913–66), a South African Olympic boxer of German and Irish descent, was a Nazi supporter who, after training with the German army, became a central part of Operation Weisdom, a plan

approved by Hitler, to assassinate General Jan Smuts, the head of South Africa's government, and bring about a coup d'état in South Africa. He was initially sentenced to death for treason, but Smuts later commuted this to life imprisonment. When the National Party came to power in 1948, he was pardoned and released.

vi Eric Holm was engaged by Zeesen Radio which broadcast Nazi propaganda to South Africa. Possibly Mandela is referring to Strauss von Molke, a former leader of the Greyshirts, a South African fascist organisation which sympathised with German Nazis, who handed over documents stolen from the Jewish Board of Deputies to anti-Semitic elements in South Africa's National Party.

vii The Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 from the four self-governing British colonies of the Cape, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony.

being alleged that they collaborated with the enemy in prosecuting the war against the Union and its allies. On coming to power, however, the present Government released these and other prisoners sentenced for treason and sabotage, notwithstanding the fact that they had been arrested in circumstances which made them appear to many South Africans as traitors to their own country. Again, by way of contrast, we draw attention to the fact that our activities were at all times actuated by the noblest ideals that men can cherish, namely, the desire to serve our people in their just struggle to free themselves from a Government founded on injustice and inequality.

We further wish to remind you that in 1966 your predecessor released Spike de Keller,<sup>i</sup> Stephanie Kemp,<sup>ii</sup> Allan Brooks<sup>iii</sup> and Tony Trew,<sup>iv</sup> all of whom originally appeared jointly with Edward Joseph Daniels<sup>v</sup> (whose names appear in the schedule) on a charge of Sabotage. Kemp, Brooks and Trew pleaded guilty to an alternative charge and a separation of trial was ordered. The case against Daniels and De Keller proceeded on the main charge and on 17th November 1964 they were found guilty and sentenced to 15 and 10 years respectively. Kemp, Brooks and Trew were found guilty on the alternative and sentenced to 5, 4 and 4 years respectively, each of which was partly suspended. We are informed that De Keller was released after he had served approximately 2 years, or less, of his sentence of 10 years, whilst Kemp, Brooks and Trew were also released before they had completed their sentences.

We do not in any way begrudge those who were fortunate enough to be released and who escaped the hardship of prison life and are happy to know that they now lead a normal life. But we refer to their case for the limited purpose of showing that our request is reasonable, and also to stress that a Government is expected to be consistent in its policy and to accord the same treatment to its citizens.

There is one important difference between our case and that of De Wet and Leibrandt. They were released only after the rebellion had been crushed and after Germany had been conquered and they were thus no

<sup>i</sup> David 'Spilze' de Keller, member of the African Resistance Movement and the Liberal Party, who spent a year in prison.

<sup>ii</sup> Stephanie Kemp (1941-), member of the African Resistance Movement and the Communist Party, who spent a year in prison.

<sup>iii</sup> Allan Brooks (1940-2008), member of the African Resistance Movement and the Communist Party, who spent a year in prison.

<sup>iv</sup> Tony Trew (1941-), member of the African Resistance Movement who spent a year in prison.

<sup>v</sup> Eddie Daniels (1928-2017), member of the African Resistance Movement who spent fifteen years on Robben Island - see the glossary

threat to the safety of the State when they were freed. In our case, however, it may be argued that our revolution is planned for the future and that security considerations require that we be treated differently. Add to this fact that our convictions have not changed and our dreams are still the same as they were before we were jailed. All of which would seem to confirm the opinion that our case is distinguishable from all previous ones. We feel sure, however, that you will not be tempted to think along these lines, as such an argument would carry sinister implications. It would mean that if security considerations today require that we should be kept in prison, we would not be released when we complete our respective sentences, if the present situation remains unaltered, or if the position worsens. The plain truth is that the racial strife and conflict that seriously threatens the country today is due solely to the short-sighted policies and crimes committed by this Government.

The only way to avert disaster is not to keep innocent men in jail but to abandon your provocative actions and to pursue sane and enlightened policies. Whether or not evil strife and bloodshed are to occur in this country rests entirely on the Government. The continued suppression of our aspirations and reliance on rule through coercion drives our people more and more to violence. Neither you nor I can predict [what] the country will have to pay at the end of that strife. The obvious solution is to release us and to hold a round table conference to consider an amicable solution.

Our main request is that you release us and, pending your decision, to treat us as political prisoners. This means that we should be provided with good diet, proper clothing outfits, bed and mattresses, newspapers, radios, bioscope,<sup>1</sup> [and] better and closer contact with our families and friends here and abroad. Treatment as political prisoners implies the freedom to obtain all reading material that is not banned and to write books for publication, we would expect to be given the option to work as one desires and to decide the trades one would like to learn. In this connection we wish to point out that some of these privileges were enjoyed both by the 1914 rebels as well as by Leibrandt and colleagues, all of whom were treated as political prisoners.

The prison authorities attempt to answer our demand for treatment as political prisoners by pointing out that we were convicted by the courts for contravening the laws of the county, that we are like any other criminals and, therefore, cannot be treated as political offenders.

This is a spurious argument which flies in the face of the facts. On this view De Wet, Kemp, Maritz, Leibrandt and others were ordinary criminals. Treason, sabotage, membership of an illegal organisation were criminal offences then as now. Why then were they treated differently? It seems to us that the only difference between the two cases is one of colour.

Serious differences of opinion on a specific issue had emerged amongst the whites, and those who lost in the contest that flowed from those differences eventually found themselves behind bars. On all other issues, especially on the major question of colour, both victor and vanquished were in agreement. The conflict having been solved it was possible for the Government to adopt a conciliatory attitude and to extend to the prisoners all sorts of indulgences. But today the position is altogether different. This time the challenge comes, not from white men, but mainly from black politicians who disagree with the Government on almost everything under the sun. The victory of our cause means the end of white rule.

In this situation the Government regards the prison not as an institution of rehabilitation but as an instrument of retribution, not to prepare us to lead a respectable and industrious life when released, and to play our role as worthy members of society, but to punish and cripple us, so that we should never again have the strength and courage to pursue our ideals. This [is] our punishment for raising our voices against the tyranny of colour. This is the true explanation for the bad treatment we receive in prison – pick and shovel work continuously for the last 5 years, a wretched diet, denial of essential cultural material and isolation from the world outside jail. This is the reason why privileges normally available to other prisoners, including those convicted of murder, rape and crimes involving dishonesty are withheld from political offenders.

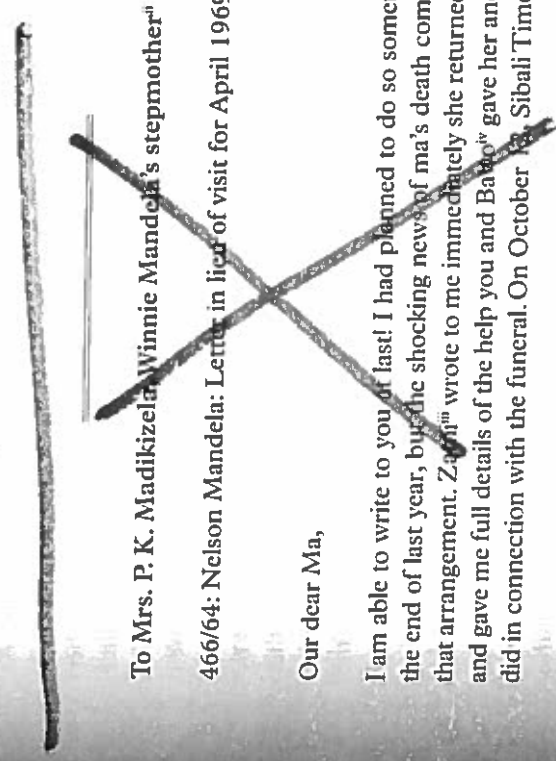
We get no remission of sentence. Whilst the ordinary prisoner is classified in C group on admission, political offenders are put in D which carries the least privileges. Those of us who managed to reach A group are denied privileges normally enjoyed by criminals in the same group. They are compelled to do pick and shovel work, are not allowed newspapers, radios, bioscope, contact visits and even groceries are given grudgingly.

As already indicated in the second paragraph above, I make this application on behalf of all my colleagues on the Island and in other jails and I trust that any concessions that may be granted will be made available to all without exception.

The Prisons Act 1959 gives to you the necessary powers to grant the relief we seek. Under its provisions you are entitled to release us on parole or probation. De Wet and others were released under the former method.

In conclusion we place on record that the years we have spent on this Island have been difficult years. Almost every one of us has had [our] full share in one way or another of the hardships that face non-white prisoners. These hardships have at times been the result of official indifference to our problems, other times they were due to plain persecution. But things have somewhat eased and we hope even better days will come. All that we wish to add is that we trust that when you consider this application you will bear in mind that the ideas that inspire us, and the convictions that give form and direction to our activities constitute the only solution to the problems of our country and are in accordance with the enlightened conceptions of the human family.

Yours faithfully,  
[Signed N. Mandela]



To Mrs. P. K. Madikizela Winnie Mandela's stepmother<sup>ii</sup>

466/64: Nelson Mandela. Letter in lieu of visit for April 1969.

4-5-69

Our dear Ma,

I am able to write to you at last! I had planned to do so sometime towards the end of last year, but the shocking news of ma's death completely upset that arrangement. Zam<sup>iii</sup> wrote to me immediately she returned from home and gave me full details of the help you and Baba<sup>iv</sup> gave her and all that you did in connection with the funeral. On October 13, Sibali Timothy Mbuzo<sup>v</sup>

<sup>i</sup> By 1969, Mandela and the other accused Rivonia trialists incarcerated on Robben Island had been there for almost five years.

<sup>ii</sup> Winnie Mandela's mother died when she was ten years old. Her father remarried nine years later to a school principal, Nophikela Hilda Maditshiza.

<sup>iii</sup> Zam is one of Winnie Mandela's names.

<sup>iv</sup> Columbus Kokani Madikizela, Winnie Mandela's father – see the glossary.

<sup>v</sup> Sibali Timothy Mbuzo, a close relative of Mandela's brother-in-law Daniel Timakwe and a long-standing leading member of the ANC in the Transkei homeland. 'Sibali' means 'brother-in-law' in isiXhosa.

gogue days<sup>1</sup> & I'm glad to note that he has fulfilled the high expectations he aroused from those who admired his ability at the time.

When I visited you in the late Fifties you had one child, a handsome son.<sup>2</sup> I hope you and Sidney [sic] were not so cruel as to condemn him to life-long loneliness by depriving him of the pleasure of company & trust that he now has at least a sister or brother.<sup>3</sup> He should now be at varsity & a source of pride and joy to both of you.

I still remember clearly the last occasion I saw you in June '64 when you seemed glued to your seat in the jury box & listening attentively to the proceedings like a layman who was attending such proceedings for the very first time in life. I look forward to seeing you, Sidney<sup>4</sup> and your son when I hope to shake hands very warmly & say: thank you. In the meantime I send you & family my very best wishes & fondest regards,

Sincerely,  
Nelson

Mrs Felicity Kentridge, c/o Nkosk Nobandla Mandela 8115 Orlando West,  
P.O. Phirima [1848] Johannesburg

*The year 1976 in South Africa was marked by a growing unease among young people frustrated by their parents' lack of resistance to apartheid.*

*The clampdown of the 1960s, which followed the arrest and imprisonment of a range of freedom fighters, was intended to have permanently suppressed opposition to the regime. The rise of Black Consciousness from the late sixties culminated in the student uprising in Soweto on 16 June 1976 against a plan to have black students taught in Afrikaans, the language of the oppressor. The police responded to the peaceful protests with live ammunition, killing hundreds. Hundreds more were arrested, many of them ending up as sentenced prisoners; even more fled the country to swell the ranks of the exiled armies of the liberation movements. Cut off from news media until 1980, the prisoners on Robben Island only became aware of what had happened in August 1976 when the first of the young people began arriving with sentences to serve.*

*The following long letter to the prison authorities detailing the continuing abuses of authority can also be read as Mandela's way of trying to improve*

<sup>1</sup> He is referring to the Old Synagogue in Pretoria which served as a court for the 1956 Treason Trial in which Sydney Kentridge was one of the defence lawyers.  
<sup>2</sup> William Kentridge (1955), one of South Africa's most famous artists and filmmakers.  
<sup>3</sup> The Kentridges had four children.  
<sup>4</sup> Sydney Kentridge was a friend of some of the Rivonia Trial defence lawyers.

*conditions for all prisoners, including the new group of angry young men. He and his comrade Walter Sisulu<sup>1</sup> stood out for their efforts to talk down the firebrands and advise them on a better path to survival in prison.<sup>2</sup>*

To the commanding officer, Robben Island

12 July 1976

The Commanding Officer  
Robben Island

Attention: Col. Roelofse

The attached letter is for the personal attention of the Commissioner of Prisons, General Du Preez, and I should be pleased if you would approve and forward it to him.

I am putting it in a sealed envelope addressed to you and marked "Confidential and for the personal attention of Col. Roelofse." But once I hand it over to the official-in-charge of the section, I have no further control over it and cannot guarantee that it will reach you in the condition in which it left me.

[Signed NRMandela]

To the commissioner of prisons

12 July 1976

The Commissioner of Prisons  
Pretoria

Attention: General Du Preez

<sup>1</sup> Walter Sisulu (1912 - 2003), ANC and MK activist and fellow Rivonia trialist who was imprisoned with Mandela  
 → see the glossary.

I must draw your attention to the abuse of authority, political persecution and other irregularities that are being committed by the Commanding Officer of this prison and members of his staff. Although this letter raises complaints of a personal nature, some of them affect other prisoners as well and it may, therefore, be necessary to mention certain names by way of illustration of these irregularities.

During the past 14 years of my incarceration I have tried to the best of my ability to cooperate with all officials, from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Section warden, as long as that cooperation did not compromise my principles. I have never regarded any man as my superior, either in my life outside or inside prison, and have freely offered this cooperation in the belief that to do so would promote harmonious relations between prisoners and warders and contribute to the general welfare of us all. My respect for human beings is based, not on the colour of a man's skin nor authority he may wield, but purely on merit.

Although I did not agree with the approach of General Steyn on the country's major problems and the policy of the Department of Prisons I, nevertheless, respected him as head of this Department and as an individual and have never had occasion to question his integrity. Even though I think he could have done more that he did to promote the welfare of prisoners here and elsewhere in the country, his genial and unassuming manner made it easy for me to discuss with him otherwise delicate matters and, in spite of many disagreements I had with him from time to time on the actual decisions he made on specific issues, he was often prepared to give a reasoned motivation for his actions.

I met your immediate predecessor Gen Nel, when he came to the Island in 1970 with Mr Dennis [*sic*] Healey<sup>1</sup> and, bearing in mind the few remarks we exchanged on that occasion, I have no reason to think that as head of this Department he fell short of the standard set by his predecessor in regard to the manner in which he handled problems I brought to his attention. Unfortunately I have not had the pleasure of an interview with you but I have assumed throughout this letter that you would do everything in your power to improve prisoner-warder relations and to promote our welfare.

I have now had no less than 3 interviews with Brigadier Du Plessis, head of the security section and, in spite of the fact that every one of my complaints was not rectified, he nevertheless tried to give reasonable explanations for his actions and outlined the policy of the Department on the matters we discussed as patiently as time allowed.

<sup>1</sup> Denis Healey (1917-2015), British Labour Party politician who Mandela first met on a short visit to London in 1962. Later Healey visited him in prison.

As I understand it, one of the principal functions of this Department is to maintain good order, discipline and the proper administration of the prison. In terms of the Prison Rules, special attention shall be accorded to the preservation of good relationships between a prisoner and his relatives in the best interests of both parties. This object is normally attained through visits, letters, telegrams, birthday, Easter and Christmas cards.

A public department is a creation of a law and should be run in accordance with the governing legal rules. The actions of both the officials and prisoners in every field of activity should be based on rules that can easily be ascertained and, even where officials are given a wide discretion on a particular point, respect for the principles of natural justice would demand a clear indication of the considerations that will be taken into account in the exercise of that discretion. This rule is observed in many countries throughout the world by public bodies which deal with human problems so as to remove or minimize the dangers of injustice through malice, caprice, arbitrariness, corruption, pettiness and other improper motives.

The actions of the Commanding Officer and his staff that are mentioned below have nothing to do with the maintenance of good order, discipline and the proper administration of the prison, nor with the promotion of harmonious relations between prisoners and officials, such actions are incompatible with the preservation of good relations between a prisoner and his relatives and constitute abuse of authority, political persecution and vindictiveness.

The absence of clearly defined rules that lay down how the discretion enjoyed by local officials is to be exercised in the particular cases indicated below has given them wide scope for malice, arbitrariness and other improper motives.

On several occasions I have tried in vain to draw the attention of Col. Roelofse to these problems and it is because he and the head of the prison Et. Prins, and the official in charge of censoring, W/O Steenkamp have fallen short of the high standard of morality required from those who are entrusted with the running of a public department that I now feel compelled to place the whole matter before you.

#### 1. Abuse of authority

- (a) On December 27, 1974 the Minister of Prisons, Advocate J. T. Kruger, in the presence of the C.O.,<sup>1</sup> granted me permission to purchase Piet Meiring's "Ons Ses Eerste Premiers"<sup>2</sup> and, at the same time, informed the C.O. that there was nothing in the book he

<sup>1</sup> Commissioner of Prisons.

<sup>2</sup> See his letter to the minister of justice from 12 February 1975, page 279.

considered objectionable. In pursuance of this permission I ordered the book, but, as it was out of print at the time, it only arrived on the Island on February 16 this year. In spite of the fact that permission to acquire the book was given by the Minister himself, and in spite of repeated efforts on my part to get it, the C.O. failed to release the book until April 27, exactly 2 months 11 days after it had arrived. I probably would not have got it if Brigadier Du Plessis had not intervened on my behalf.

(b) Both Col. Roelofse and Lt Prins have been systematically practicing racialism to prisoners in the Single Cell Section and trying to foment feelings of hostility among us.

(i) At the meeting of the Prison Board this year, the C.O. asked a coloured prisoner from this section what he thought of the level of civilisation of the 'Bantu' in the section and how the coloured prisoners were getting on with the 'Bantu'. When this particular prisoner replied that his African colleagues in this section were educated and cultured men for whom he had good respect and that we all got on with one another, the C.O. made disparaging remarks describing Africans as being from a low level of civilisation and as people who walked about the country half naked.

(ii) On two previous occasions W/O Prince, as he then was, made remarks to 2 Indian prisoners, speaking to each one on a different occasion, to the effect that Africans were uncivilized and that when they were in power they would attack whites, coloured and Indians alike, and stressed that the best course for Indians would be to join whites. To one of them he added that he always thought politically on these matters.

It is dangerous to entrust the task of promoting the welfare of prisoners to officials who hold racialistic views, and it is an abuse of authority to take advantage of their official positions to try and create feelings of hostility amongst prisoners of different population groups. We totally reject apartheid in all its forms and the C.O. had no right whatsoever to attempt to sell us an idea we regard as diabolical and dangerous.

In this connection, I should like to add that the conduct of these officials is not only improper but also contrary at least to the avowed official policy. Government spokesmen, including

<sup>i</sup> While the word 'Bantu' comes from 'Abaantu' meaning people, it can be seen as offensive in a context such as this one where the speaker is using it as a racial description. It was used under apartheid to refer to Africans.

the present Premier, have repeatedly repudiated the idea that any particular population group in the country is superior to others.

## 2. Improper interference with Social Relationships

(a) My youngest daughter, Zindziswa,<sup>i</sup> sent me photographs on 3 different occasions, one of which I actually saw in my file in 1974 when W/O Du Plessis and I were looking for the copy of a letter I had written to a former Minister of Justice. When I asked for the photo, he told me we should deal with one thing at a time and, for that day, I left the matter there. When I subsequently asked for it, the photo had disappeared.

I mentioned the matter to Lt. Terblanche then head of the prison, who told me he would investigate it. Later, I received 2 other letters in which my wife reported that my daughter had sent other photos. As I had not received them, I immediately placed the matter before Lt Prins. Although I mentioned it to him twice thereafter, I have never heard from him again.

I might add that I had no trouble with letters from my daughters until Zindziswa complained to the United Nations about the systematic persecution of her mother by the Government and I believe that the difficulties that have since arisen with her correspondence with me and that of her elder sister, Zenani,<sup>ii</sup> is a pure act of vindictiveness from the C.O. acting in collaboration with the Security Police.

(b) In January this year my 2 daughters wrote me letters which they sent by registered post. Although both Lt Prins and Sgt Fourie of the Censors Office have assured me that they have not been received, I have been given the same information before and later discovered that in actual fact, the letters had already been received when such assurances were given.

(c) Two children who live with my wife also sent me 2 registered letters about the same time. A month or so after that, my wife advised me of this fact and Sgt Fourie assured me as usual that they had not been received. I warned him of the seriousness of telling me an untruth in regard to letters sent by registered post and asked him to make further investigation. He later informed me that he had checked as requested but reiterated his earlier assurance.

<sup>i</sup> Zindziswa Mandela (1960-), Mandela's youngest daughter - see the glossary.  
<sup>ii</sup> Zenani Mandela (1959-), Mandela's middle daughter - see the glossary.

I then reported the matter to Lt Prins who subsequently acknowledged that the letters had been received some weeks before I spoke to Sgt Fourie. Lt Prins then formally advised me that the letters would not be given to me because they were militant and written by children who did not know me. One is related to my wife and I was already in prison when she was born. The other was only 5 when I was sentenced. Lt Prins refused to tell me why I was given untruthful explanations about the letters by Sgt Fourie. Precisely the same thing happened with the letters from Mrs Adelaide Joseph<sup>1</sup> and again the abovementioned 2 officials were involved.

(d) Letters written by my wife to her relative, Mr Sandi Sejake, also in this section and those written by him to her do not reach their destination.

(e) There are many cases of this nature, but I should like to cite that of my fellow prisoner Theophilus Cholo, who was convicted in 1973 and who has not received a visit from his wife since then, their only means of contact being through letters. He last received one from her in February this year and in May Lt. Prins refused to give him a 3 page letter from her on the ground that its contents were objectionable, and at the same time prohibited him from telling her that her letter was withheld from him. I now consider the untruthful explanations that are repeatedly made by the local officials about our correspondence and the so-called objection either to the contents of the letter or person who wrote it as a mere technique to deprive us of the legal right of preserving good relationships between ourselves and our relatives and friends.

### 3. Censorship of outgoing mail

The following examples will demonstrate to you the type of difficulties we are having due to over-suspicion on the part of your officials and maybe even to their difficulty of understanding the language and its idiom.

(a) On July 1, 1975 I sent a birthday card to a friend who is in his early thirties and ended the message of felicitations with the greeting in phonetic script: "Me-e-e-i Bra-a-a!" which is a corruption of the Afrikaans "My Broer" and which form of greeting is commonly used by today's urban youth. I was told to rewrite the whole birthday message and to leave out the words quoted above. I was asked for no explanation and put to the unnecessary expense of using another card.

<sup>1</sup> The wife of Paul Joseph (1930-), a South African political activist, exiled in London. When Mandela was arrested in 1962 she brought him food in prison.

(b) As has often happened in the past, the birthday card I sent to my daughter Zindziswa, on December 1 last year did not reach her. On February 1 I wrote to my wife:

"These are the only occasions when I sometimes wish science could invent miracles and make my daughter get her missing birthday cards and have the pleasure of knowing that her Pa loves her, thinks of her and makes efforts to reach her whenever necessary. It is significant that repeated attempts on her part to reach me and the photos she has sent have disappeared without trace whatsoever."

Again I was ordered to omit this passage and when I asked Sgt Steenkamp, as he then was, for an explanation he discourteously told me that the letter would not go if I did not rewrite it.

(c) My daughter Zindziswa plays rugby at school and has openly discussed her sport interests both during her visits and in her letters. In her letter of February 8 this year which came through the normal official channels, she complained about loss of weight. On April 15 I wrote back to her:

"But if you really want to be in top condition for such strenuous games as rugby, which require tremendous reserves of energy and speed, you'll have to pay due attention to your diet - eat well, I repeat, eat well! Although I do not know where Mum will raise all the cash for that."

The passage was disallowed and Lt Prins refused to give me any explanation about the matter.

(d) My grandniece, Xoliswa Jozana,<sup>1</sup> wishes to study LL.B with a view of practising as a lawyer and the parents asked for my advice as to whether it would be wise for her to do law. On April 15 I wrote back to them encouraging my grand-niece to proceed as she wished, but at the same time advised the parents that I have been out of practice for 16 years and would accordingly consult Mrs F Kenridge, who formerly practised at the Johannesburg Bar. On May 9 I wrote to Mrs Kenridge<sup>2</sup> along the lines indicated above and, on June 4, Lt Prins arrogantly told me that I should rewrite the letter and leave out the facts mentioned above, adding that the Matanzimas could get the advice from somebody else.

<sup>1</sup> Xoliswa Jozana, daughter of K. D. Matanzima (1915-2003), Mandela's nephew, a Thembu chief, and chief minister for the Transkei - see the glossary. His middle name was Dalwanga.  
<sup>2</sup> See his letter on page 291.

It was the hostility with which he spoke more than his unreasonable explanation that struck me. In addition, I wondered what had happened to my letter of April 15. Whatever they did with it they acted improperly. If they sent it to the Matanzimas then they allowed me to make a promise to my relatives which they knew in advance they would not permit me to fulfill. If the letter was held back, I should have been told about the matter, which was not done.

To prevent me from telling my wife that I sent my daughter a birthday card which did not reach her, that I always think of her and that the photos she had posted to me had disappeared is an unreasonable act based neither on security considerations nor on the desire to maintain good order and discipline nor to promote my welfare. The same applies to my letter to Mrs Kentridge in which I requested her to advise my grandniece on her desire to become a lawyer.

#### 4. Censorship of incoming correspondence

But the worst abuses in regard to the censoring of letters are committed in regard to incoming correspondence and, in this connection, the C.O. and his staff have gone rampant. The censoring is malicious and vindictive and again is motivated by considerations of security and discipline not the desire to promote our welfare.

I regard it as part of a campaign of systematic political persecution and an attempt to keep us in the dark about what goes on outside prison & about our own family affairs. What the C.O. is trying to do is not only to cut us off from the powerful current of goodwill and support that has ceaselessly flown in during the 14 years of my incarceration in the form of visits, letters, cards and telegrams, but also to discredit us to our family and friends by presenting us to them as irresponsible people who neither acknowledge letters written to them nor deal with important matters referred to us by our correspondents.

In addition the double standards used in censoring letters is cowardly and calculated to deceive the public into the false impression that our outgoing mail is not censored. In the case of outgoing letters we are required to rewrite them whenever there is any matter to which the prison authorities object, so as to remove any evidence that they have been heavily censored whilst incoming ones are badly cut or scratched out as the censors please. Nothing will best convey to you the extent of the damage caused to our incoming mail more than an actual inspection by you in person. Many of the letters from my wife consist of strips of incoherent information that are difficult to keep together even in a file.

My wife has been in prison several times and not only knows the relevant Prison Rules well, but also the sensitivity of your local officials to anything they might consider objectionable. She makes a conscious effort to confine herself to family affairs, yet hardly a single one of her letters escapes mutilation.

On November 24 1975 she wrote me a 5-page letter and only the remains of 2 pages finally reached me. The censorship policy adopted here is not followed even by your own officials in other jails. As you are aware, my wife has recently served a 6 months sentence in Kroonstad. Some of her letters were passed by the C.O. of that prison but heavily censored this end.

But what I intensely detest is to force us to be parties to a practice based on our plain falsehood. It is immoral for the C.O. to destroy or withhold letters from our families and friends and at the same time prevent us from telling them about what he does with them. I consider it callous to allow our people to continue wasting money, time, energy, goodwill and love by sending us letters and cards which the C.O. knows will never be given to us.

Between December 1974 and April 1976 no less than 15 letters for Mr A Kathrada were withheld. Among them were those from members of his family, from Prof Rampol, Messrs Ismail Bhoola, Essop Pahad<sup>i</sup> and Navraj Joseph.<sup>ii</sup> Lt Prins refused Mr Kathrada permission to tell his people to stop writing to him, adding that he found their letters interesting. When Mr Kathrada said he supposed the security police were also interested, Lt. Prins, although he did not say so categorically, indicated that they would be so interested. This is a clear case of abuse of authority and you ought to issue a public statement in which you clearly define the policy of your Department, and set out, more particularly, what you consider objectionable and the categories of persons who may not write or send us money or messages of goodwill.

#### 5. Disappearance of letters in transit

The number of letters that disappear in transit is far too large to be explained on the basis of the inefficiency of the Post Office Department and, from the unreasonable and persistent refusal of the C.O. to allow us to register our letters, I must draw the inference that their disappearance is not accidental. In this regard the C.O. recently made

<sup>i</sup> Essop Pahad (1939-), political activist in exile in London.  
<sup>ii</sup> Paul Joseph, a political activist in exile in London.

a bad mistake which confirmed my suspicion that in these matters he and subordinates are not acting openly.

On March 1 I wrote to Mr Q Mvambo, care of my wife, and at the same time advised her about it. She replied that she had not received the letter to Mr Mvambo and the C.O. had that information cut out from my wife's letter so as to keep me in the dark about the fact. If the C.O. were not implicated about the disappearance of this particular letter why did he deliberately try to conceal the fact?

The registration of outgoing mail will partly solve this particular problem and the introduction of this practice will not increase the work of the local officials at all. A post office book for the bulk registration of mail can be used as in all big firms and we are prepared to do the secretarial work under the supervision of the Sgt in charge of the section and all that the censors would be required to do would be exactly what they are doing now, namely, to enter the letters in the official records and post them away.

#### 6. Visits

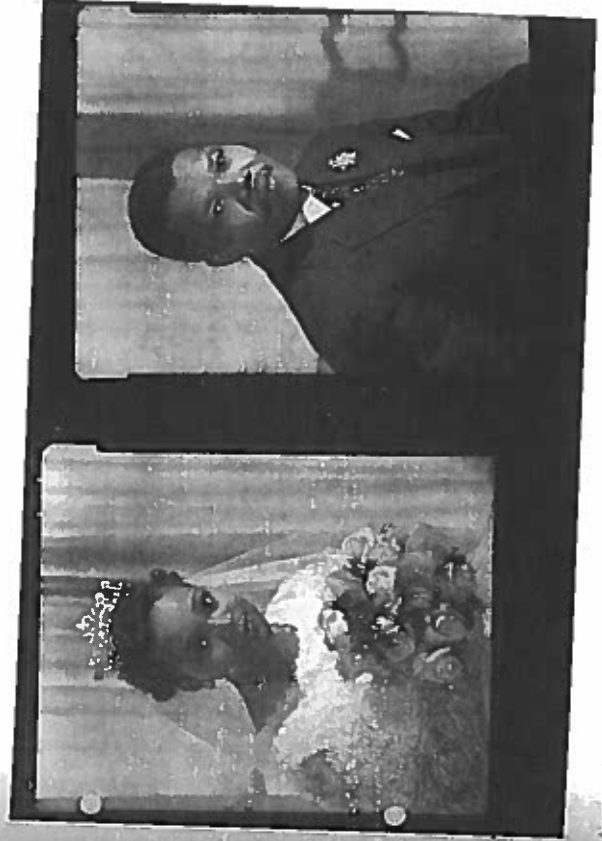
Even here the measures taken by the C.O. in supervising conversations between prisoners and their visitors go beyond the security requirements. To put four and sometimes even six warders on duty to one visitor, breathing into her face or staring threateningly at her is a blatant form of intimidation.

It is my duty to tell you that there is a widespread belief amongst my fellow prisoners that at these visits there is a listening device that records all conversations, including confidential matters between husband and wife. If this be the case there is hardly any justification for the show of force now generally displayed during such visits. I might add that I encountered repeated opposition from the warden-in-charge when, during one of her visits, I kept on reminding my daughter not to allow herself to be distracted by these strong-arm tactics. For several years in the past only one or two warders were on duty during these visits and I request you to reintroduce this system.

In addition, we were also allowed to use memory aids to make certain that nothing of importance would escape attention and to deny us that privilege after we have enjoyed it for more than a decade is to deprive us of all the advantages of a planned and systematic conversation. We have repeatedly assured the C.O. that we would be prepared to submit these aids for inspection before and after the visit. Moreover, as there are always warders on duty, the danger of passing on objectionable information does not exist at all.



Mandela on the roof of Khoload House, Johannesburg, in 1953, where both Ismail Meer and Ahmed Kathrada lived during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and which became an informal meeting place for anti-apartheid activists



A contact sheet of Nelson and Winnie on their wedding day in June 1958

7. Language qualifications of the censors

The man who is directly in charge of censoring of our mail and magazines is W/O Steenkamp who was previously in charge of this section. Although he may have passed matric English, he is certainly no more proficient in that language than I am in Afrikaans and I doubt if Sgt Fourie is any the better in this regard. I would certainly consider it an injustice to entrust me with the task of censoring Afrikaans letters. Neither of the officials in the Censors Office is properly qualified for the job.

Even the C.O. finds it difficult to express himself in English. In fact, during the 14 years of my imprisonment I have met no C.O. whose English is as poor as that of Roelofse; who commands a prison where the overwhelming majority of prisoners are English-speaking and who have no knowledge of Afrikaans at all.

The poor language qualifications of the local officials, especially in the Censors Office, may be one of the contributing factors to the unreasonably heavy censoring of our letters and it is proper for you to review the whole position and appoint censors who are thoroughly conversant with English, Hcrero, Ovambo,<sup>1</sup> Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa and Zulu.<sup>2</sup>

8. Ban on correspondence with political supporters

Lt Prins has now told me that we are no longer allowed to communicate with any people known to the Department to be our political associates nor to relatives of other prisoners, irrespective of the contents of the letter. He accordingly refused me permission to write a condolence letter to Mrs N Mgabela, wife of a fellow prisoner on this island, who lost a grandchild. He also did not allow a letter to Mrs Lilian Ngoyi,<sup>3</sup> a lifelong friend, who helped look after the house and the children when my wife was jailed. A letter I wrote to her on January 1, 1975 and in which I thanked her for her gesture never reached. The failure of all my attempts to acknowledge the help she freely gave and her hospitality to the children is a constant worry to me and I must request you to allow me to send her a copy of the letter of January 1. I am equally anxious to send Mrs Mgabela my condolences and undertake not to say anything in the letter to which any reasonable objection might be made by the C.O.

<sup>1</sup> Hcrero and Ovambo are languages from Namibia.

<sup>2</sup> Sotho is the language of the Sotho people, Setswana is the language of the Tswana people, isiXhosa is the language of the Xhosa people and isiZulu is the language of the Zulu people.

<sup>3</sup> Lilian Ngoyi (1911-80), politician, and anti-apartheid and women's rights activist - see the glossary.



Above: Robben Island prisoners were made to sit in rows in the prison courtyard and smash stones into gravel.



Above: Members of the team appointed by Minister of Justice Kobie Coetsee to hold meetings with Mandela while he was in prison: l-r General Willems, commissioner of prisons; Aandela; Dr Niel Barnard, head of the National Intelligence Service; Kobie Coetsee, and Fanie van der Merwe, director general of justice.

### 9. Telegrams and Easter Cards

(a) the C.O. has introduced a new practice of not allowing us to see the actual telegrams sent to us. He has given us no reasons for departing from a practice that has been followed for many years. But I have had two experiences in which the local officials have been quite negligent and failed to deliver telegrams punctually.

(i) In 1972 when Col Willemse was C.O., I expected a visit on Saturday from my eldest daughter, Makaziwe.<sup>i</sup> That Saturday I was actually taken to the visiting rooms but she did not arrive. Later she wrote and referred me to a telegram she had sent postponing the visit. In response to my enquiry, the telegram was delivered two weeks after it had been received here. Col Willemse, however, gave me an explanation which exonerated him from any blame in his personal capacity and we settled the matter amicably.

(ii) Last year I was given a telegram announcing the death of the brother of the Paramount Chief Sabata Dalindyebo<sup>ii</sup> and advising me of the day when he would be buried. Although the telegram was received before the funeral, it was given to me about 6 days after the burial and I now strongly protested at what I considered to be plain irresponsibility.

What happens now is that we are given a message scrawled on a piece of paper, sometimes in writing that is difficult to read, and without the date when the telegram was sent and received as well as other essential information. Again the current belief is that some of these telegrams are first referred for scrutiny to the Security Police before delivery to the addressee and in order to cover up the delay in handing over, the C.O. has introduced this practice.

The people who send these telegrams pay more money in order to ensure a speedy transmission of the message and it is a matter of public concern when a government department deliberately frustrates the smooth and efficient operation of a public service for which citizens pay an appropriate fee.

(iii) For several years now I have received Easter cards from a number of friends but this year none arrived. Last month and again in response to my enquiries Lt. Prins told me that one had arrived but that he objected to the person who sent it and refused to

disclose the identity of the sender. Against the background set out above I did not find it easy to accept the truthfulness of that statement.

### 10. Money received for prisoners

There is a general impression amongst prisoners here that the C.O and the Security Police are running a racket with our moneys. Although I have no evidence to substantiate this allegation, I should like to draw your attention to the following aspects:

(a) Last December my wife told me that our friends, Mr and Mrs Madhaku, from Botswana,<sup>1</sup> had sent me R20.00. I immediately enquired from Lt Prins and on several occasions this year he assured me as usual that the money had not been received. Early in May the accounts section, in response to an earlier request, furnished me with my balance and statement of moneys credited to my account<sup>ii</sup> as from February 1975 to this year.

On May 31 Lt Prins sent a message to the effect that an amount of R30.00 was received from the Matlhakus on November 5 1975. No explanation as to why this year he repeatedly told me that the money had not been received nor why the money was not shown as having been credited to my account in the statement supplied to me by the accounts sections, nor about the covering letter from the Matlhakus. I assume that in due course I will be given the usual flippant excuse that the C.O. objects either to the Matlhakus or the contents of the letter.

(b) I have repeatedly complained about the amount of R40.00 which, according to my wife, was sent to me by my nephew from Cape Town and even mentioned the matter to Brigadier Du Plessis on April 28, as I had done with that of the Matlhakus. Lt Prins asked me to produce proof that this amount had been sent by my nephew and I showed him one letter from my wife and promised to produce a second one, also from my wife, which was not immediately available when I gave him the first. Early in May I offered to show him the second letter and he indicated that he would tell me when he wanted. To the best of my knowledge and belief the matter has received no further attention.

<sup>i</sup> Khamael and Marika Matlhaku, political activists and friends. They went into exile in Botswana.

<sup>ii</sup> Upon entering prison, a list was made of the belongings a prisoner had with them. Details of the amount of cash a prisoner may have brought with them were recorded in an individual account under the name of the prisoner (this was not a bank account but simply a separate bookkeeping record). Thereafter, any funds reaching the prisoner in the name of that prisoner were recorded in that account and so too were any disbursements made in the name of the prisoner. When they were discharged from prison, the prisoner was given what remained in the account.

<sup>i</sup> Makaziwe Mandela (1954-), Mandela's eldest daughter - see the glossary.

<sup>ii</sup> King Sabata Jonguhlanga Dalindyebo (1928-86), paramount chief of the Transkei homeland and leader of the Democratic Progressive Party, the opposition party in Transkei which opposed apartheid rule - see the glossary.

- (c) For several years now, Mr G Mlyekisana and friends in Cape Town have been sending me and some of my fellow prisoners Christmas presents in the form of small amounts. None of us received any of these sums last year. This cannot be a pure coincidence. I believe the C.O., acting in consultation with the Security Police, has done something to prevent us from getting the moneys which he does not wish us to know.
- (d) My friend, Mr Robert Matji, from Lesotho wrote some time last year and promised to send me and another fellow prisoner money for study purposes and, despite repeated enquiries, I have not been told whether or not that money came.

I must tell you that in the negligent manner in which my complaints have been investigated and the lengthy delays involved in extracting simple information on what are essentially trust monies, is a matter of serious concern which you ought to investigate as soon as you can to clear the reputation of your Department at least in this particular respect. In the light of my experiences with the amount from the Matlhakus, you will readily appreciate my present state of mind on this question.

#### 11. Problems relating to health matters

- (a) About July last year and as a result of a knee injury I sustained last year whilst working at the seaside, Dr Edelstein recommended that I should be provided with a sanitary pail lighter than the standard one I am presently using. Sgt Schoeman of the local hospital duly communicated the doctor's recommendation to the head of the prison. When difficulties arose, I personally interviewed Lt Prins on the matter. Although the injury has now healed, I was never provided with the pail as recommended by the doctor.
- (b) On July 17 this year and again on health grounds, Dr Edelstein recommended that I could acquire at my own cost a pair of pyjamas and this recommendation by a competent medical practitioner was turned down by the C.O. on the ground, I learn, that prisoners are only allowed to buy sports equipment. With due respect to the C.O., it seems to me ridiculous to allow us to buy outfits for mere recreation, a concession we naturally appreciate, and refuse us permission to buy nightwear recommended by an experienced doctor.
- As a matter of fact the C.O. knows only too well that his decision is arbitrary and inconsistent with a practice he himself has

followed. My skin is sensitive to brackwater used on the Island, and on the recommendation of [the] doctor, I have been using a special cream since the Sixties to keep the skin soft.

On July 5 I discussed the matter with Dr Edelstein and he was surprised that I encountered difficulties in this matter and promised to take up the issue with the C.O. directly. I have since been informed that he could not move Col Roelofse. With his surprisingly backward views on race relations, I believe the C.O. fears that if I acquire the pair of pyjamas as recommended by Dr Edelstein, the Senior Medical Officer on the Island, I will virtually become a white man.

In this country only white prisoners have the right to sleep in pyjamas with the exception of those fellow prisoners who are hospitalised locally and who are provided with a nightshirt which in many cases barely reaches ones knees. Black prisoners here sleep naked with only blankets as a cover. This is the real reason for the unusual step of a mere layman vetoing the considered decision of a competent professional man in his own field. When I saw Dr Edelstein on June 17 Sgt Schoeman had suggested that the prison hospital could provide me with a nightshirt which the doctor found unsuitable. It was after this offer that had been made that Dr Edelstein made his recommendation.

For 13 years I have slept naked on a cement floor that becomes damp and cold during the rainy season. Although I am physically fit and active, such unhealthy conditions have caused some damage. I will certainly not embarrass Dr Edelstein who has treated me well by discussing the matter with him again. But I need the outfit urgently and I must request you to allow me to purchase the recommended pyjamas at the earliest possible convenience.

I hope, General, you will not consider it as a threat directly or indirectly when I say that I have the legal right to take measures to protect my health and, once the medical officer is of the opinion that these measures will best improve a man's health, the C.O. has no jurisdiction whatsoever in the matter.

#### 13. Political discussions at the sittings of the Prison Board<sup>ii</sup>

It has been the practice for several years now at the sittings of the Prison Board for its members to engage prisoners in political discus-

<sup>i</sup> The prisoners collected seaweed.

<sup>ii</sup> Brackish water - fresh water mixed with seawater.  
Footnote 12 of Mandela's original letter was missing; he must have mis-numbered when writing it.

sions. Political discussions are welcome and may even be fruitful if they are properly arranged by the right people. The correct premise for any such discussions is the clear recognition that we are loyal and disciplined members of political organisations that have definite policies, and that on fundamental political problems we cannot act as individuals but as representatives of our organisations.

Secondly, if the discussions are to be profitable, we must be told about them beforehand, be furnished with the actual topic for discussion, the names of the persons who will conduct such discussions with us and their principal aim. It is certainly not the function of the Board to conduct discussions of a political nature and I consider the whole practice improper and request you to stop it. Its function is to submit reports to the COP on the conduct, training, aptitude and maturity of a prisoner and to make recommendations for his classification, release without conditions, or on probation or parole.

It is also the firm opinion of my fellow prisoners that these discussions are used by the Board for the purpose of victimising those who are opposed to the policy of separate development by not upgrading them.

#### 14. Other acts of victimisation

Throughout our stay here we have been constantly subjected to various forms of victimisation for a variety of reasons connected with political events outside the prison or with the usual tensions that characterise relations between prisoners and warders. Many examples can be quoted to illustrate the point, but for purposes of this letter, it is sufficient to mention 3 of the current or recent cases.

(a) As you are aware the churches have provided us with an inter-communication system to supply us with music from records bought by ourselves. Since the installation of the service we have invested in more than R1,000 worth of records. The service has been out of action for about 5 months now and we do not accept the explanation that the main difficulty in restoring it is the C.O. cannot obtain the necessary spare parts.

(b) On July 3 we expected to see a film in accordance with a programme which has been in operation for some time now. It was not shown and the only explanation given by W/O Du Plessis was that it was not worth seeing.

(c) A hot water system was installed last year and, on several occasions since its installation, the electric geyser failed but the electrician was able to fix it in a matter of minutes. For more than a week now, it

has been out of order and the 'breakdown' coincides with a spell of cold weather on the Island. The remarkable thing about the matter is that, although we repeatedly reported the matter to the authorities, the electrician has not even come to examine the apparatus to see what is wrong with it, with the result that we have been deprived of hot water at the one time of the year when it is most needed.

The coincidence between the disorder in the geyser and the spell of cold weather becomes even more significant when considered against the surrounding circumstances. The general practice in the past has been to keep the span<sup>ii</sup> inside on rainy days but on July 7 the span was sent out to pull out bamboo<sup>iii</sup> from the sea although it was raining. They returned about lunchtime all wet and cold. By the morning of July 8 a few had contracted a cold. With the possible exception of the severe winter of 1964, this was certainly the coldest day on the Island in the last 12 years. Nevertheless the span was again sent out to the same spot which was the most exposed in the whole of this area from about 8am to 3.30 pm. The span shivered from cold and many were almost numb on their return. On July 9 a delegation consisting of Messrs Billy Nair,<sup>iv</sup> John Pokela and JB Vusani discussed the whole matter with Lt. Prins who promised that throughout the winter the span would not again be sent to work on that spot. He also arranged for hot water to be brought in drums from the kitchen.

#### 15. Complaints against juniors

Lt. Prins, W/O Du Plessis and Steenkamp and Sgt. Fourie are all too junior to be expressly mentioned in a letter from me to you. But they are the officials in charge of our affairs and it is through them that the C.O. abuses his authority and persecutes us.

I have repeatedly brought to his attention most of the complaints discussed above without success. It is clear that he considers it his duty to support almost everything done by his officials against prisoners, however wrong that official may be, and I see no useful purpose whatsoever in pursuing these issues with him any longer.

<sup>i</sup> Mandela includes a note in the margin to see footnote 22 and writes at the end of the letter: 'In regard to this matter I speak purely as a layman and from experience of what actually happened in the past when the geyser was out of order. It may well be that the electrician has some more reliable means of identifying the fault without actually inspecting the apparatus itself.'

<sup>ii</sup> This is actually a type of seaweed which had the Afrikaans name of *bambous*. (Christo Brand, *Doeng Life in Robben Island*, p. 38.)

<sup>iii</sup> *Mandela* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2014, p. 38.)

<sup>iv</sup> Billy Nair (1929-2009), comrade and AIC member who was charged with sabotage in 1963. He was held in B Section with Mandela on Robben Island and was released in 1984 - see the glossary.

As already indicated, I have had no less than 3 interviews with Brigadier Du Plessis and, in spite of his friendliness and courtesy it is clear that the situation is in many respects beyond his control, and what has happened since his last visit and my interview with him seems to have fanned the abuse of authority and political persecution.

Had I not been a Black prisoner born and brought up in South Africa, and who has been subjected in his daily life to all the excesses of racial prejudice, I would not have believed that normal human beings could be associated with such a mania for persecuting their fellow men. It is a mean type of cowardice to wreak vengeance on defenceless men who cannot hit back. An honourable warrior is no peacetime hero who concentrates his attacks on those who carry no weapons and he prefers to use his sword against those who are similarly armed.

16. The C.O.P.'s failure to visit political prisoners on Robben Island

The abuses described above are aggravated by your failure personally to visit the Island and to give us the opportunity to discuss these problems directly with you. The C.O. told us in the course of an interview with him early this year, that Gen Nel's term as C.O.P. would be expiring soon and that he was not likely to visit the Island before his retirement. This was unfortunate because regular visits by the C.O.P. are in themselves a means of checking abuses by subordinates and the knowledge that he would not be coming down made the C.O. unrestrained in his actions.

When Gen. Steyn was C.O.P. he visited us at least once a year and listened to complaints and requests. Then he brought Col. Badenhorst who tried to terrorise us and, in order to give him a free hand to transgress the law, Gen. Steyn stayed away from the Island whilst we were being persecuted, tortured, beaten up and humiliated in various ways. In 1972 I gave judges Steyn, Theron and Corbett, in the presence of Gen. Steyn and Col. Badenhorst, details of the persecution we had received whilst the latter was C.O., stressing that in spite of my repeated requests to Gen Steyn to continue visiting the prison regularly he had kept away. I told the judges that he had stayed away because he realised that he could not defend the illegalities that were being committed by his subordinates. I got the distinct impression that the judges were as much concerned about the General's failure to carry out his duties in this particular regard as I was.

<sup>1</sup> Justice Michael Corbett (1923-2007) was the judge who administered Mandela's oath of office when he became president of South Africa in 1994.

A visit by other officials from Headquarters, whatever their ranks may be, can be no substitute for a visit by the Department Head in person. As already indicated, our treatment here is much influenced by political events outside prison and, in a way, the C.O. treats us like hostages. Whenever South Africa is under heavy attack for its racial policies, prison officials try to vent their anger and frustration on us.

In addition, any substantial complaint from a political prisoner, however genuine, tends to be regarded as a threat to the survival of the white man and even high ranking officials consider it their duty to resist it at all costs. In the prevailing political atmosphere in which it is being denounced by the whole world, no officials from Headquarters who still look forward to promotions and other lucrative benefits after retirement, are to burn their fingers by checking the abuses of a C.O. and upholding the complaints of the men who have played a part in mobilising opposition to apartheid. Only you and you alone, is in a position to take a bold line and confine the actions of the C.O. within the four corners of the law.

It is my earnest opinion that his actions fall outside the scope of the Prison Rules. A C.O. and Head of the Prison who still try today to perpetuate the myth of the superiority of the white man, who equate civilisation with a white skin and the clothing one wears, are not the fit and proper persons to be in charge of an institution, one of whose principal aims is the promotion of the welfare of Black prisoners.

One of the main causes of the friction here is the link between this Department and the Security Police and one of the first steps in your attempt to redress our grievances is to cut out that link completely. Honest officials from the Department frankly admit that in many respects we, as political prisoners, fall outside the scope of the Department and are the responsibility of the Security Police. The latter have no legal right to interfere in the internal administration of this institution and I hope that, in this regard, you will be able to assert yourself far more than your predecessors were able to do, and stop this unwarranted practice. Our treatment should be the responsibility of your Department not just in theory but in actual practice as well. The duty of the Security Police is to ensure that we are kept in a maximum security prison and their authority should go no further.

Many prisoners regard the C.O.P. in relation to all matters concerning us as a mere figurehead, and that the real boss is the Chief of the Security Police who order the C.O.P. not only what to do but how to do it. It is the Security Police that have induced your Department to want to isolate us from the people outside prison, to deny us the

love of our wives and children and the good wishes from our friends by cutting down visits to the so-called first degree relations, trying to terrorise our visitors, not allowing us to use notes at visits, through malicious censoring of letters, cards and other material, false information in regard to letters, cards and money received on our behalf and the unprecedented 'disappearance' of letters in the post.

I have been wondering for some time now whether I should continue to be party to a practice I consider unethical and which gives the impression that I still enjoy rights and privileges which have been whittled away so much so that they have become practically useless. In particular, I have considered the question whether I should allow my wife and children to come down the 1000 miles from Johannesburg at great expense only to see me under such humiliating conditions, whether I should allow them to waste time, energy and money to write letters that 'disappear' in transit and whose remains that reach me are quite disconnected and meaningless. I resent the fact that before every visit they should receive lectures from swaggering and vindictive officials as to what they may or may not say when they talk to me.

Since January 1973 to June this year I have received 42 letters from my wife. Of the 6 I got in 1973 only 3 were mutilated. Off the 11 which came in 1974 7 were heavily censored and in 1975 6 out of the 16. But the picture for 1976 is totally different. Of the 9 I have received since the beginning of the year only 1 reached me unscathed. It is this situation that makes me wonder whether I should continue enduring these indignities.

But I still believe that you, as Head of this Department, who holds the rank of General, will not allow or condone these underhand methods and, until your actual decision on the matter proves me wrong, I shall continue to act in the belief that you are not aware of what is going on in this prison.

It is futile to think that any form of persecution will ever change our views. Your Government and Department have a notorious reputation for their hatred, contempt and persecution of the Black man, especially the African, a hatred and contempt which forms the basic principle of a multiplicity of the country's statutes and cases. The cruelty of this Department in subjecting our people to the indecent practice of thawuza according to which a prisoner was required to strip naked and display his anus for inspection by an official in the presence of other prisoners, the equally obscene practice of a warder poking a finger into a prisoner's rectum, of brutally assaulting them daily and without provocation, was curbed by the Government after it had erupted in a national scandal.

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But I still believe that you, as Head of this Department, who holds the rank of General, will not allow or condone these underhand methods and, until your actual decision on the matter proves me wrong, I shall continue to act in the belief that you are not aware of what is going on in this prison.

It is futile to think that any form of persecution will ever change our views. Your Government and Department have a notorious reputation for their hatred, contempt and persecution of the Black man, especially the African, a hatred and contempt which forms the basic principle of a multiplicity of the country's statutes and cases. The cruelty of this Department in subjecting our people to the indecent practice of thawuza according to which a prisoner was required to strip naked and display his anus for inspection by an official in the presence of other prisoners, the equally obscene practice of a warder poking a finger into a prisoner's rectum, of brutally assaulting them daily and without provocation, was curbed by the Government after it had erupted into a national scandal.

But the indignity of the average South African warder still remains, only now it has been directed into other channels and has taken the subtle form of psychological persecution, a field in which some of our best officials are striving to become specialists. You are not aware of how many psychologists around psychiatric hospitals in circumstances such as yours as their most desperate show 'flam assault'. I have the hope that a man of your rank and experience will unmercifully grasp the gravity of this practice and take adequate measures to stop it.

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But the inhumanity of the average South African warder still remains, only now it has been diverted into other channels and has taken the subtle form of psychological persecution, a field in which some of your local officials are striving to and becoming specialists. You are no doubt aware that many psychologists regards psychological persecution in circumstances such as ours as more dangerous than plain assault. I have the hope that a man of your rank and experience will immediately grasp the gravity of this dangerous practice and take adequate measures to stop it.

It is pointless and contrary to this country's historical experience to think that our people will ever forget us. Although 160 years have passed since the Schlachters Nek executions,<sup>i</sup> 74 since the internment camps of the Anglo Boer War<sup>ii</sup> and 61 since Jopie Fourie<sup>iii</sup> made his last speech, I will certainly never believe you when you tell me that you have now forgotten those Afrikaner patriots, the men whose sacrifices helped to free you from British Imperialism and to rule the country, and for you in particular to be Head of this Department.

It is certainly quite unreasonable for any man to expect our people, to whom we are national heroes, persecuted for striving to win back our country, to forget us in our lifetime at the height of the struggle for a free South Africa. Your people are slaughtering mine today and not a century and a half ago. It is present South Africa that is a country of racial oppression, imprisonment without trial, of torture and harsh sentences and the threat of internment camps lies not in the distant past but in the immediate future. How can our people ever forget us when we fight to free them from all these evils?

In South Africa, as in many other countries, various issues divide prisoners and officials. I do not agree with the policy of the Department of which you are the Head. I detest white supremacy and will fight it with every weapon in my hands. But even when the clash between you and me has taken the most extreme form, I should like us to fight over principles and ideas and without personal hatred, so that at the end of the battle, whatever the results might be, I can proudly shake hands with you because I feel I have fought an upright and worthy opponent who has observed the whole code of honour and decency. But when

<sup>i</sup> In 1815 a Boer farmer named Bezuidenhout refused to answer to charges of having mistreated his workers. He was shot by a British soldier, when they came to arrest him. His supporters attempted to have revenge and were arrested. Six were executed by hanging at Schlachters Nek.

<sup>ii</sup> The British ran concentration camps for Boer women and children during the South African War (1899-1902) and separate ones for black prisoners.

<sup>iii</sup> 'Jopie' Fourie (1879-1914), an Afrikaner rebel, was the last person to be put to death by firing squad in South Africa after he rebelled against the government which had chosen to support the British in the First World War rather than the Germans.

your subordinates continue to use foul methods then a sense of real bitterness and contempt becomes irresistible.

[Signed NRMandela]  
NELSON MANDELA

oooooooooooo

*Winnie Mandela was also detained in August 1976 when she came out strongly in support of the students and their uprising. She visited police stations to search for missing students, helped to arrange funerals for those killed, and consoled families.*

To the commanding officer, Robben Island

[In another hand]  
466/64

Special letter<sup>1</sup> to apply to speak personally to the Colonel in connection with his wife

The Commanding Officer,  
Robben Island  
Attention: Col. Roelofse

18 August 1976

This morning Chief Warder Barnard advised me that my wife would not be able to receive the telegram I handed in for dispatch to her on August 12 on the ground that she has been arrested.

In this connection, I should be pleased if you would grant me, at your earliest possible convenience, an interview to enable me to discuss the matter. I should like to draw your attention to the fact that my wife has been arrested on several occasions before and served [a] sentence twice already. On the first occasion when she was arrested, General Steyn, then Commissioner of Prisons, ruled that it was humanitarian and reasonable that I should be given full particulars about her arrest, detention, charge, sentence and place where she was kept in custody.

<sup>1</sup> Special letters were not deducted from a prisoner's quota.