

# *Ahmed Kathrada*

*1929 - 2017*

A Pictorial Tribute

By

Fakir Hassen



While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid, we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil; a triumph of wisdom and largeness of spirit against small minds and pettiness; a triumph of courage and determination over human frailty and weakness; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old.”

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– Ahmed Kathrada

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*Grateful thanks to Sammy and Shumarlan Naidoo of Apple Print and Packaging  
for publishing this book*

This book is a very small tribute to the inspirational Uncle Kathy, who in his 80's still spent more time in service of others than many of his age who had long since retired. It is a minute reflection of the many events he was at all over the globe, and only reflects on those few which I was privileged to cover. A much more comprehensive account of the life of this great son of South Africa is available from the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

## **AHMED KATHRADA - A PICTORIAL TRIBUTE**

**BY FAKIR HASSEN**

**ebook ISBN 978-0-620-75422-4**

**Published March 2025**

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**THIS LIMITED-EDITION BOOK IS NOT FOR SALE**

“Someone beat you to it,” were the last words Ahmed Kathrada said to me a few weeks ago at the launch of the book ‘Conversations with a Gentle Soul’ by Sahn Venter, about a series of talks with him.

Uncle Kathy, as we had fondly come to call the veteran activist, was commenting on my request last year when he was the keynote speaker at the launch of my book ‘101 Gandhian Inspirations’ at the Killarney CineCentre, to sit down with him for a few sessions to record some of his wisdom for a book.

“Only for you,” was Uncle Kathy’s comment at the time, as he was already then scaling down his hectic schedule of public engagements even at the age of 87.

Living in Johannesburg like Uncle Kathy, I ended up with the privilege of covering scores of events where he was involved over the past two decades, including the honour of being a guest at his 75<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.

If there were children at any event, I could almost write in advance the emotional advice Uncle Kathy would give them about ensuring that they used the benefits of education that were now available to them, unlike as in the apartheid era.

I was in India when Uncle Kathy was awarded the country’s highest honour for Indian-origin citizens of other countries, the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, from the President of India.

I was on Robben Island when Uncle Kathy conducted one of the many tours for so many tourists whom he held rapt with his graphic accounts of the time he and others spent there.

I wrote about how he might have been lost to the South African freedom struggle if a plan succeeded by his maternal Moulana uncle who was so impressed with six-year old Ahmed's Quranic recitals that he wanted to take him back to the ancestral village of Lachpur in India.

I was there when the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, aimed at fighting discrimination and promoting non-racialism, was born.

I watched Uncle Kathy become a Freeman of the City of Johannesburg.

I photographed Uncle Kathy proudly showing the pink shirt with his name on it, prepared last month by Cricket South Africa for the annual international match in aid of cancer awareness.

I was privileged to experience the humility of Uncle Kathy at so many places for so many years, and today, I am at his funeral. Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi rajeeoon. (To Allah we belong and unto Him is our return).

- Fakir Hassen, 29 March 2017

June 2006 - Parliamentarians old and new – Nirvana Secondary School's mini-Parliament of Ministers, each with a specific portfolio allied to the national cabinet, pose with veteran local politicians - Asma Bibi Karolia, Katija Jaime, Bhavini Patel, Issu Chiba, Ismail Vadi, Ahmed Kathrada, Saffiya Hassen, Thandile Mmolawa and Karishma Sookgrim.



## VETERAN HONOURS



April 2008 - Ahmed Kathrada and veteran Lenasia-based photo-journalist Gopal Naransamy, who captured much of the local history of the struggle over several decades, were among the recipients when the Lenasia ANC branch paid tribute to many veteran politicians at the Nirvana Haven Senior Citizens' home with special citations. The citation featured a picture of Robben Island where many of the members who were being honoured had spent many years in prison as political prisoners in the apartheid era.

## AMEEN AKHALWAYA'S BOOK LAUNCH

April 2008 - Members of the extended Akhalwaya family and guests Zarina Mia, Farida Akhalwaya, Ahmed Kathrada, Nancy Coulson, Sahm Venter, Zaytoon Abed holding baby Mohammed Talha, and Raymond Louw, former editor of the now defunct Rand Daily Mail. A number of speakers, many of them reduced to tears through emotion, recounted the roles that Ameen had played in their lives with his wit and humour, but steadfast determination to produce accurate, fair and truthful journalism in the apartheid era.



## 79<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY



August 2008 - Housing Minister Lindiwe Sisulu proposes a toast to mark Ahmed Kathrada's 79th birthday as the chairman of the Board of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Cyril Ramaphosa prepares the drinks.



September 2008 - At the opening of the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa at Wits University were the Director of the Centre, Prof Stephen Gelb; Ahmed Kathrada; Indian External Affairs Minister Anand Sharma, ANC veteran Mosie Moolla and Prof. Loyiso Nongxa, Wits Vice-Chancellor and Principal.

## AL BARAKA BANK DONATION

November 2008 - The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation got a boost from Al Baraka Bank. The donation was handed over during the launch of Kathrada's latest book, titled '*A Simple Freedom*'.



August 2009 - Ahmed Kathrada blows out the symbolic 80 candles on his cake, surrounded by friends, including many who were detained with him on Robben Island in the apartheid era. With him are Zarina Motala, Reggie Vandeyar, Shirish Nanabhai, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, President Jacob Zuma and Mac Maharaj. Motlanthe jokingly told the audience that this was "a bunch of jailbirds" on the stage. India's Independence Day celebrations in South Africa I-Day ended on a high note as well when Indian High Commissioner Rajeev Bhatia handed over a cheque for US\$200 000 to the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation.



## NEWTOWN DIWALI FESTIVAL

October 2009 - Watching the proceedings on stage at the FNB Newtown Diwali Festival were special guest Ahmed Kathrada, Ganesh Nardhamuni, Roshel Ramasamy, and Kay and Bobby Madhav.



December 2009 - Lenmed Clinic in Lenasia celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a gala banquet at the Lenasia South Civic Centre. Past and present Board members received commemorative awards from guest of honour Ahmed Kathrada, who lauded the visionaries of Lenmed for establishing a critical health facility for the broader community in the under-served apartheid era. The facility was later renamed Ahmed Kathrada Private Hospital.



## CHERRIES FROM MICHIGAN



February 2010 - Ahmed Kathrada's love for food was further highlighted when American guest Marsha MacDowell surprised him with a huge bag of one of his favourites – chocolate-covered cherries, a delicacy from the US state of Michigan.



February 2010 – There was a double launch at the Trade Route Mall in Lenasia – an exhibition of original artefacts relating to the life of struggle veteran Ahmed Kathrada, which was on display to the public for two months; and a book on several hitherto unknown heroes of the fight against apartheid. Nikita Padiachee shows her copy of the book that Ahmed Kathrada had just signed for her. Kathrada is flanked by Abdul-Kadir Saloojee, who contributed material for the exhibition (left) and Shirish Nanabhai, whose story is one of those in the book.

## FREEDOM PARK HONOURS



November 2010 - The first 200 indentured labourers who arrived in 1860 from India were honoured on the 150th anniversary of the event by having their names inscribed on a Wall of Honour at Freedom Park in Pretoria in November 2010. Veteran Indian women from the struggle joined Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane to lay wreaths at the plaques in recognition of the trials and tribulations of the first settlers who worked long hours under trying conditions which were a far cry from the promised good life that had lured them to shores where they were isolated from their language, culture and religion.

## SOD TURNING FOR THE FOUNDATION



Kathrada turned the first sod, followed by the excited dignitaries.

August 2011 - VIP's are dwarfed by the sign unveiled minutes earlier to indicate the site for the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation at the entrance to Lenasia.



## WORLD LITERACY DAY

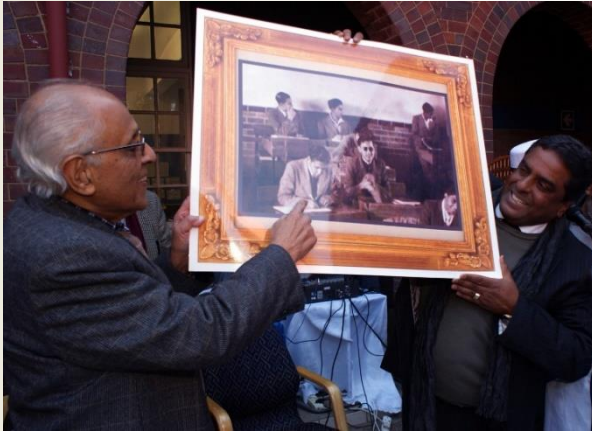


September 2011 - Impala Crescent Primary School Principal Naazim Adam with guest speaker Ahmed Kathrada on World Literacy Day, where I shared a platform to hand over copies of my book for all Johannesburg public libraries. Kathrada reminded learners how some of today's leaders in South Africa had learnt to read while in prison on Robben Island with him.

June 2012 - Donor Ahmed Cassim and chief guest Ahmed Kathrada unveiled the plaque at the new training centre of JOCOD in Lenasia.



## JOHANNESBURG HIGH SCHOOL



Kathrada was at the school for the official opening of the library at the school as a Mandela Day event. The school was once the Johannesburg High School for Indians in the apartheid era.

July 2012 - A clearly bemused Ahmed Kathrada points out himself as a young student at Johannesburg Secondary School in a picture presented to him on Mandela Day by Principal Ashraf Dawood.





August 2012 - Executive Mayor of Johannesburg Parks Tau placed a gold medal on Ahmed Kathrada to grant him the Freedom of the City, an honour previously bestowed only on Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Joe Slovo and Dr Beyers Naude. Tau said it was appropriate that it was being done at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication where the Freedom Charter was adopted on 26 June 1955.

In his typical style of acknowledging others, Kathrada singled out Emma Mashinini of Soweto, who he described as 'my twin' because she was born on exactly the same day as him.



## ANNUAL LECTURE

October 2012 - Founder of the Citizens Movement for Social Change, Dr Mamphela Ramphele; Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel; and Ahmed Kathrada were flooded with questions and comments about government incompetency at the annual lecture of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation in Lenasia.



## GANDHI'S SPINNING WHEEL AND PRIZES



October 2012 - At the Lecture, the family of veteran activist Baboo Nagdee handed over a replica of a spinning wheel used by Mahatma Gandhi, which will find a home in the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation. Learners who won a competition run by the Foundation received their prizes from Kathrada.



## LENMED LAUNCH



November 2012 – Lenmed Clinic saw the cream of Gauteng’s healthcare and business community gather at its original site in Lenasia as veteran activist Ahmed Kathrada officially opened a new three-floor wing at a gala banquet. The entire facility was later renamed Ahmed Kathrada Private Hospital.

December 2012 - Ahmed Kathrada urged those holding the reins of power in South Africa to uphold the values enshrined in the Constitution. Kathrada was speaking at the University of the Witwatersrand during its annual graduation ceremony, where he received an honorary Doctor of Literature (DLitt) degree from the Chancellor, Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke. *Photo: Ahmed Kathrada Foundation*



## THE GANDHI WALK



May 2013 – Ahmed Kathrada put many younger walkers to shame at the annual Gandhi Walk in Lenasia. With him are Shan Balton and Busisiwe Nkosi. After becoming a regular participant, the Gandhi Walk Committee decided to allocate Kathrada a permanent number in 2016, as shown by Chairman Amit Parbucharan. The number reflected his cell number during the decades he spent on Robben Island. Pageant winners always vied to be seen with Kathrada, who was equally proud of being photographed with them.



## ESQUIRE TECHNOLOGIES; ISIDINGO

August 2013 - Ahmed Kathrada was a natural actor when he played a cameo role in the hit TV series Isidingo that he was an ardent fan of. Isidingo cast member Leeanda Reddy shared this at his 84th birthday function in Johannesburg.



July 2013 - Asgar Mahomed, Managing Director of Esquire Technologies, Ahmed Kathrada and Deputy Education Minister Enver Surty at a Mandela Day event hosted by Esquire Technologies and the Caring Women's Forum at the N'wa Mhinga Primary School in Atteridgeville.

## LONG WALK MOVIE PREMIERE; PALACE OF JUSTICE



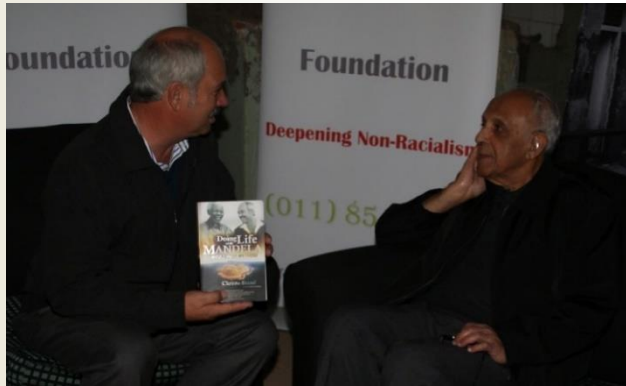
November 2013 - Ahmed Kathrada leaves the podium after making remarks about the movie while comedian Riaad Moosa, who played him, and director Justin Chadwick look on at the gala premiere of the film 'Long Walk to Freedom' in Johannesburg.



November 2013 - Ahmed Kathrada chats to George Bizos, the lawyer who defended him, Nelson Mandela and others at the Rivonia Trial 50 earlier in the Palace of Justice. Looking on is Judge Jody Kollapen before everyone went down to the holding cells of the future leaders.

## CHRISTO BRAND BOOK LAUNCH; RIVONIA 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

May 2014 – Former jailer Christo Brand and Ahmed Kathrada reminisce about the tales told in Brand’s book ‘Doing Life with Mandela – My Prisoner, My Friend’



June 2014 - Despite the suffering they had endured, Rivonia Trial accused Ahmed Kathrada and Denis Goldberg were full of wit and humour as they regaled a full house at the Apartheid Museum on 12 June, the 50th anniversary of their sentencing in the infamous Rivonia Trial.

## 85<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY

August 2014 - Hundreds of people from all walks of life gathered at the Lifestyle Centre in Fordsburg to share Ahmed Kathrada's birthday. The Chairman of Lenmed, Prakash Devchand, announced at the event that the flagship clinic in the group's portfolio would henceforth be known as the Lenmed Health Ahmed Kathrada Private Hospital in honour of Kathy's lifetime of selfless service to the community.





September 2014 – Ahmed Kathrada congratulated graduates Tejal Manga, Sheevani Ambaram, Karishma Magan and Poonam Kassen of the Jhankaar School of Dance led by Dr Ranjit Laloo at the Gandhi Hall in Lenasia.

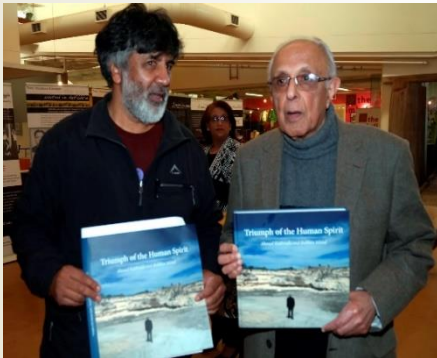
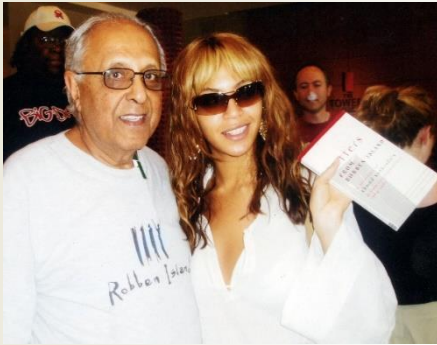
## AWARD TO A PUPPET

November 2014 - At the annual Ahmed Kathrada Lecture at Sci-Bono in Newtown, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa said: “The subject of this lecture – nation building, redress and reconciliation – neatly encapsulates a central theme of the life and work of Ahmed Kathrada. As one of the greatest sons of our soil, and also one of the most unassuming, Comrade Kathy has dedicated his life to the achievement of a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it, black and white. This lecture not only pays tribute to his contribution to our struggle. But in its own way, it also advances that struggle.”

“I’m presenting an award to a puppet,” Kathrada jested after the famed puppet Chester joined his ventriloquist master Conrad Koch to entertain the audience with his witticisms and political satire.



## ZULEKHA MAYET; BEYONCE ON ROBBER ISLAND



June 2015 - "Tell them about Beyoncé," Ahmed Kathrada reminded Executive Director of the Kathrada Foundation Shan Balton, with a twinkle in his eye and a childlike grin. Balton was sharing with the audience at Museum Africa the imminent launch of the coffee table book 'Triumph of the Human Spirit – Ahmed Kathrada and Robben Island' showing pictures of people, including many celebrities, who were part of the more than 300 visits to Robben Island that were led by Kathrada. "Never mind that you did not even know at the time who she was except that she was a very pretty young woman," Balton jested back. - *Beyoncé picture: Ahmed Kathrada Foundation*



June 2015 - Ahmed Kathrada and author Zulekha Mayat recalled their lifelong friendship at the launch of her new book 'Journey of Binte Batuti' at Museum Africa. The two corresponded for many years while Kathrada was imprisoned on Robben Island, along with Nelson Mandela and others.

## LEGION OF HONOUR CHEVALIER

August 2015 - Ahmed Kathrada with French ambassador to South Africa Elisabeth Barbier as he joined former President Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and author Nadine Gordimer as the only South Africans to have received French national honours. The award is part of the National Orders of the Legion of Honour established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802. The order of Chevalier (Knight) is made to people who have served a minimum of 20 years of public service or 25 years of professional activity, and who have done more than is ordinarily expected in contributing to the development of others. *Picture – Ahmed Kathrada Foundation*





August 2015 - After successful launches of the book in Cape Town and Bloemfontein, 500 guests at a gala banquet at Palm Continental in Mayfair each received a copy of the book '*Triumph of the Human Spirit*' to mark Ahmed Kathrada's 66<sup>th</sup> birthday. Kathrada was joined by his brother Yusuf and niece Zohra, surrounded by a host of guests.

## BIRTHDAY GIFTS FROM HERE AND ABROAD



August 2015 – Birthday gifts for Kathrada included a R100 000 donation from the the Free State government to bolster the coffers of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which aims to deepen non-racialism in South Africa.

Representatives from the University of Johannesburg's Confucius Institute presented Li Bing's painting to Ahmed Kathrada.



Shree Bharat Sharda Mandir School learners joined Kathrada, Shan Balton and fellow veteran Shirish Nanabhai.

## LAUNCH OF 101 GANDHIAN INSPIRATIONS



July 2016 – Ahmed Kathrada was the keynote speaker at the launch of my book ‘101 Gandhian Inspirations’ at the Killarney CineCentre. With us were veteran Gandhian follower Chotubhai Makan; Indian High Commissioner Ruchi Ghanashyam and Sammy Naidoo of Apple Print and Packaging. Kathrada held the audience rapt as he explained the relevance of Gandhi’s teachings in both the history of the South African freedom struggle and the current situation that the world find itself in today.

## CBE LIFETIME AWARD REMEMBERED

September 2016 – Ahmed Kathrada with members of the Congress for Business and Economics, a revived arm of the erstwhile South African Indian Congress. The organisation bestowed a Lifetime Achievement Award on Kathrada in November 2013. They were at a fundraising banquet of the Kathrada Foundation at Palm Continental in Mayfair, where there was also a belated birthday celebration for Kathrada. Helping him light the candles was Indian High Commissioner Ruchi Ghanashyam.





September 2016 - There was a rare treat in store for those who gathered for a Heritage Day breakfast at the Roasted Coriander Restaurant in Greenside, Johannesburg when they got to hear, meet and take selfies with several veteran freedom struggle heroes and heroines. In particular, a number of young people interacted with Ahmed Kathrada, Mosie Moola, Ronnie Kasrils, Dr Essop Jassat, Fatima Hajaj, and sisters Ramnie Dinath and Shanthie Naidoo. "I learnt in school that you were in jail for 26 years. Can you please tell us what it was like to be in prison for so long, as the textbooks don't tell us that," asked one student, to which Kathrada again highlighted how the worst thing for him was not hearing, seeing or touching a child, after which they scrambled to be in a picture with him, much to his delight.

November 2016 – Avalon Group CEO AB Moosa arranged a special screening of the film One Humanity for Ahmed Kathrada, who also featured alongside Nelson Mandela, and many other global leaders and celebrities in the film. One Humanity is about music, politics, and the fight to end apartheid. “Uncle Kathy had expressed a wish that everyone should see this film,” Moosa said as he arranged a public screening at Killarney CineCentre in Johannesburg, where this book was also launched in April 2017.



## R2M DONATION FROM INDIAN GOVERNMENT



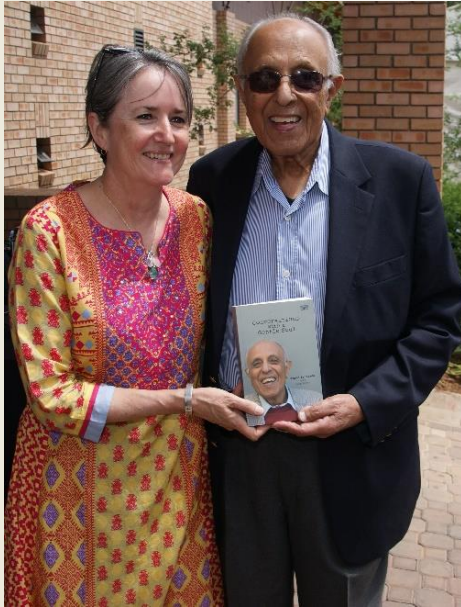
Indian Consul General in Johannesburg Dr K J Srinivasa; High Commissioner Ruchi Ghanashyam; veteran South African freedom fighter Ahmed Kathrada, Executive Director of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Shan Balton; and Deputy High Commissioner Dr S. Janakiraman.

January 2017 - A two-million-rand donation from the government of India to the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation in South Africa will be used to kick-start plans for a huge endowment fund to fight racism across the globe.

“During his recent state visit to South Africa, the Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Nelson Mandela Foundation and interacted with prominent struggle heroes, including Mr Kathrada,” Ghanashyam said at the handing-over ceremony at the Indian Consulate in Johannesburg.

“The Prime Minister acknowledged Mr Kathrada’s significant contributions to the freedom struggle in South Africa, where despite his advanced age, he leads a busy public life championing the cause of non-racialism and an equitable society in South Africa and around the world.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH A GENTLE SOUL



February 2017 - Ahmed Kathrada might have been lost forever to South Africa if his family had succumbed to a request from his visiting Moulana uncle from the ancestral family village of Lachpur in Gujarat state in the 1930's.

Impressed with Kathrada's Quranic recital skills as a six-year-old child in the rural town of Schweizer-Reneke, Moulana Murhoob Ahmed Kathrada, who later became a Mufti in Burma, wanted to take his nephew back with him, perhaps to continue the long line of religious leaders in the family. "My mother threatened to go on a hunger strike if he took me. Thank God she did," Kathrada revealed in a new book, titled 'Conversations with a Gentle Soul'.

The book is a collection of interviews over the past year by journalist Sahn Venter, who has spent a lot of time with Kathrada since he was released after spending just one year less than his lifelong friends Nelson Mandela as political prisoners.

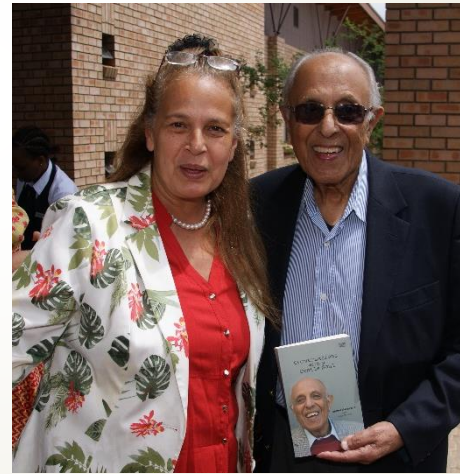
## THE PINK CRICKET SHIRT

February 2017 - Kathrada proudly showed his personalised pink shirt made for him by Cricket South Africa for their annual international game at the Wanderers in aid of cancer awareness to Nelson Mandela Foundation CEO Sello Hatang and his nephew Ali Aerington.



## THE LAST PHOTOGRAPHS

February 2017 - At the book launch at the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Houghton, Zarina Motala and Amina Frense were among those keen to have a photograph with Kathrada, the last I was privileged to take of the revered icon.



## PRAYER SERVICES

March 2017 – With rumours flying about Uncle Kathy being critically ill in hospital, Shan Balton called it “fake news” at a prayer service, one of many across the country, hosted by community radio station Eastwave in Lenasia, attended by a host of community organisations and individuals as prayers were said by representatives of diverse religious groups. A huge banner with get well messages was signed by those present, but sadly, Uncle Kathy never got to see it as he passed on just five days later.



## THE FUNERAL SERVICE

29 March 2017 - Ahmed Kathrada was laid to rest in the Heroes Acre section of the Westpark cemetery in Johannesburg. He was buried according to Muslim rites, becoming the first person of Indian origin to be interred in the area demarcated for national leaders. Minister of Tourism and Board member of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Derek Hanekom commented on the mixed racial composition of the more than 3,000 mourners at the funeral service. Hanekom said Kathrada would have been proud of this, as promoting non-racialism was why he had established the Foundation. Former President Kgalema Motlanthe delivered the eulogy,



## THE LAST RITES



ANC leader Paul Mashatile led the ceremonial flag ceremony at the official State funeral before the coffin was carried on the shoulders of thousands of mourners to the grave site for the final prayer, which was explained to those present by Moulana Ebrahim Bham of the Jamiatul Ulema (Council of Muslim Theologians).

