

Nomzamo Nobandla Winnifred

Madikizela-Mandela

Member of Parliament

Member of the ANC National Executive Committee

Former President, ANC Women's League

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's extraordinary life has been marked by vicious and constant harassment by the apartheid regime and prolonged separation from those she has loved.

Throughout most of her adult life, Madikizela-Mandela has had to endure a forced separation from her husband, the first President of a democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years of his life in prison including Robben Island.

Born on September the 26th 1936 in Bizana, Transkei, Madikizela-Mandela was the fourth of the eleven children, of whom four are still living.

Madikizela –Mandela did her primary education in Bizana. She went on to eMfundisweni Secondary School where she did a junior certificate and completed her Matric at Shawbury high School. She attained a Social Work diploma at the Jan Hofmeyer School in Johannesburg. In the midst of severe harassment by apartheid government in the late 1990's, Madikizela-Mandela was able to attain a degree in Bachelor of Arts, Political Science and Internal Relations at the University of Witwatersrand. She is a recipient of numerous honorary doctorates including those from Merryland University U.S.A and I. G Benedion University, Nigeria. Madikizela-Mandela was the first black social worker in South Africa. It was during her work at Baragwanath Hospital that Madikizela-Mandela started to become politically active. She became

more conscious of the abject poverty and appalling conditions under which black people were forced to live under apartheid.

Madikizela-Mandela's involvement in the South African liberation struggle dates back to the 1950's. Her first detention was in 1958 and coincided with the mass arrests of women involved in the anti-pass campaign. At the time she was the chairperson of the Orlando West branch of both the ANC and ANCWL.

Madikizela-Mandela received the first of her several banning orders in 1952 which restricted her to Soweto. Five years later, she was arrested in Cape Town while on a visit to her imprisoned husband, Nelson Mandela. This heralded numerous unrests and detentions which were to become her way of life.

In 1969, she became one of the first detainees under Section 6 of the notorious Terrorism Act. She was detained for 18 months in solitary confinement in the condemned cell at Pretoria Central before being charged under the Suppression of Communism. The famous "Trial of 22" took place in 1970. After initially being found guilty, Madikizela-Mandela and the other accused were discharged on appeal.

Madikizela-Mandela was imprisoned in Kroonstad along with her good friend Dorothy Nyembe until 1975. She was on the last national executive committee of the original ANC Women's League, along with other legends of the women's struggle like Lillian Ngoyi, Florence Matomela and Frances Baard. After the ANCWL was banned together with the ANC, these women leaders tried to continue their work through the Federation of South African Women, and much later formed the federation of S.A Black Women, which was immediately banned. In 1976, Madikizela-Mandela was actively involved in organizing young people to oppose substandard Bantu Education. Following the 1976 Soweto uprising, she was arrested and served six (6) months at "no 4", (The Fort Prison)

On May 16 1977, Madikizela-Mandela was taken directly from the prison to Brandfort where she was banned for nine (9) years. In Brandfort her

house was bombed twice. She was then arrested for defying her restriction order by returning to her home in Soweto where she still lives.

Winnie Mandela's courage and leadership abilities have triumphed over years of political harassment and severe personal pain to enable her to become the President of the ANCWL.

With the democratic breakthrough of 1994, Madikizela-Mandela became a Member of the Parliament and a Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture. Upon leaving the Cabinet and Parliament, she dedicated her energy on working with different communities especially people affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty and suffering.

At the historic Polokwane Conference of the ANC in December 2007, Madikizela-Mandela was elected into the current National Executive Committee of the ANC with 500 votes more as no. 1. She was elected back to the National Parliament during the 2009 general elections.

The life of Madikizela-Mandela encompasses commitment to community upliftment, the selfless struggle against apartheid and determination to build a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa.

In fact it is almost an impossible task to condense such a life into a single biography. Volumes will still be written by historians.