



## PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**ATTENTION: NEWS/ENTERTAINMENT**  
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**“Hatred, revenge, bitterness – these are negative emotions. The person harbouring those emotions suffers more than the one who is dignified / forgiving / loving / at peace / generous.”**

On Sunday September 15 at 6.57pm on SABC3, **21 Icons South Africa** continues the series with its eighth icon – Ahmed “Kathy” Kathrada who spent 26 years of a life sentence in jail on Robben Island and Pollsmoor, with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and other political prisoners. He was 34 in 1964 when he was locked up and 60 when he was released in 1989. Yet after a lifetime behind bars this remarkable 84 year old has emerged with no trace of bitterness.

His irreverent sense of humour and irrepressible presence lit up the 21 Icons set at his home in Johannesburg, where filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn shot Kathrada against a white canvas backdrop inscribed with his 40 favourite quotations.

One of Kathrada’s pastimes during his 18 years on the Island was to secretly jot down quotations to express his freedom of spirit despite his physical incarceration. This love of words inspired Steirn’s visual composition. “You’d never think that such a gentle man with so much humility and humour had spent his lifetime in jail. One of the things that struck me was that words and phrases were his companions,” Steirn said.

In 2009, Kathrada collaborated with author Tim Couzens on “A Simple Freedom”, a collection of quotes and writings by Kathrada when he was in jail. Said Couzens of the work that was shortlisted for the 2009 Sunday Times Alan Paton Award: “Collecting thousands of quotes was Ahmed Kathrada’s way of freeing his mind. The quotations covered a wide range of topics by many authors and eventually numbered several thousand, which he jotted down in seven clandestinely kept exercise books. We chose 40 of the

quotations and wove reminiscences and observations around them.”

His commitment to non-racialism has seen the establishment of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which promotes the values enshrined in the Freedom Charter and Constitution of South Africa. The core of the Foundation’s work is to “deepen non-racialism and create an equitable society”. The proceeds of the sale of the original, signed portrait will go to the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation.

Kathrada was born on August 21 1929 in Schweizer-Renecke in the Transvaal to Indian immigrant parents. Because there was no school for Indians in the small town he left to go to school in Fordsburg in Johannesburg. He quickly became politically involved and became the secretary-general and later president of the Transvaal Indian Congress.

While collaborating with the African National Congress on campaigns against apartheid laws, Kathrada met Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu.

In July 50 years ago, he was arrested at the headquarters of the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and was one of those accused of sabotage in the Rivonia Trial. The trial ended on June 12 1964, with eight men sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island – Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni, Billy Nair, Dennis Goldberg and Kathrada.

Renowned for his extraordinary memory, Kathrada recalls in the **21 Icons South Africa** short film the details of every day Island life with humour, modesty and humility, providing a unique insight into the camaraderie of the prisoners, their profound belief in their cause and the brutal ways the authorities tried to break them.

After 18 years on Robben Island Kathrada was moved to Pollsmoor where he was “very unhappy” because he missed his “tea club” friends from the Island. “So the first thing I did is try to get back to Robben Island.”



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“You could’ve been the first man to swim back to Robben Island,” Steirn retorts in the film.

On his release in 1989 Kathrada received a hero’s welcome in Soweto. In 1994 he became a MP in the first democratic government and was appointed political adviser to President Mandela. In June 1999, he left parliamentary politics.

Viewers and fans of **21 ICONS South Africa** will be able to follow it on **Twitter: @21icons**; view on the website at **[www.21icons.com](http://www.21icons.com)**; or comment at **[www.facebook.com/21icons](http://www.facebook.com/21icons)**.

**21 ICONS South Africa** is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Nikon and Deloitte and supported by The Department of Arts & Culture as a nation-building initiative.

#### **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

Filmmaker and photographer, Adrian Steirn in conversation with former political prisoner Ahmed Kathrada who spent 18 of his 30 years as a political prisoner on Robben Island with among others, Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu.

The interview reveals how this extraordinary and modest man was able to maintain his dignity and freedom of mind while he was denied all other liberty.

#### **PHOTOGRAPH DETAILS**

Photographer Steirn shot Kathrada against a white canvas backdrop inscribed with 40 of his favourite quotations, the emphasis being on the man and his words.

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On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**

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