



MIHTY PEN Journalist Zubeida Jaffer during an interview at Wembley Studios in Cape Town for Adrian Steirn's 21 Icons project PHOTO: GARY VAN WYK

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I believe that I am part of a common humanity. One South Africa, one world, one universe.

I'm a child of God. I've got many identities, but I am not prepared to accept that I'm one thing only.

ZUBEIDA JAFFER

Defender of *truth*

This week, 21 Icons celebrates the 14th icon of its second season: **Zubeida Jaffer**, an award-winning South African journalist and author. Jaffer, who holds a master's degree from Columbia University, was the first South African woman to receive the US's Foreign Journalist Award in 1994. She also received an award from the New York Foreign Press Association for outstanding academic and professional work.

In a fitting honour, today is International Day to End Impunity for crimes against journalists. This day is about acknowledging the defence and promotion of freedom of expression.

At present, the world is a dangerous place for journalists. Killed and imprisoned worldwide in record numbers, they face daily threats, attacks and intimidation from private individuals, non-state actors and government officials who seek to silence them. The overwhelming majority of these crimes are committed with impunity.

Jaffer is one such journalist who has used her craft as a weapon to oppose the apartheid regime's domination and was imprisoned twice for reporting news the government of the day wanted to suppress.

The 21 Icons portrait of Jaffer features her surrounded by newspaper pages swirling in the wind, conveying that her writing helped free her and the South Africa she was fighting for.

In an intimate conversation, Jaffer talks about her journey as a journalist who seeks to uncover the truth and give people who can't express their own views an outlet to share their opinions and thoughts.

Born in Claremont, Cape Town, in 1958, she was aware at a young age of the Group Areas Act and the impact of racial segregation.

Not afraid to expose the truth, Jaffer was detained by the authorities for two months in 1980 after exposing police killings.

During her detention, she was held in solitary confinement, where she was tortured and beaten.

In 1986, after editing community and trade union papers, she was detained again while pregnant.

She was released after six weeks, only to be rearrested nine weeks later and jailed with her infant.

After South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, she went to Columbia University in New York to sharpen her skills and received a master's degree in journalism in 1996.

At first, Jaffer was reluctant to go, but fellow icon Albie Sachs, a former Constitutional Court judge and apartheid activist, convinced her. He told her if she was serious about her career in journalism, she should go to New York because it was the heart of media reporting.

She is also a graduate of UCT and Rhodes University, and has been a political analyst for the Institute for Justice and

Reconciliation. Jaffer is currently writer in residence at the University of the Free State, where she has been tasked with reshaping the university's journalism curriculum.

In celebrating 20 years of democracy, Jaffer maintains that government must be put under pressure and held accountable for its actions.

"With the Protection of State Information Bill, I said to one of the members of Parliament that if it was to be passed, government would be putting me in jail in a few years' time.

"When he disagreed, I in turn maintained my position because if somebody is going to come to me with a bit of information I think is important enough to be published, to take the risk to circulate it, then I'm going to do it.

"I'm not going to consider anything else. If it's important information or state information, and it needs to be known, I'm going to go ahead and write it.

"And then the state is going to have to put me in jail. I cannot support something that imprisons me."

● Jaffer publishes on zubeidajaffer.co.za and thejournalist.org.za

● Watch Zubeida Jaffer today on SABC3 at 8:27pm

● For more information, visit 21icons.com

THE DEFENDER



PHOTO: ADRIAN STEIRN

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