

**SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF JOHANNESBURG, CLR
MPHO PARKS TAU, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERMENT OF
FREEDOM OF THE CITY STATUS ON MR AHMED KATHRADA,
WALTER SISULU SQUARE, SOWETO – JOHANNESBURG**

21 August 2012

Madam Speaker: Clr Constance Bapela
Comrade Kathy and Friends
Chief Whip of Council: Clr Prema Naidoo
Members of the Mayoral Committee
Leaders of all Political Parties
Veterans of our struggle
Fellow Councillors
Acting City Manager: Gerald Dumas
Managers and Officials of Council
Distinguished guests
The media
Fellow Citizens

Madam Speaker, I have the great honour to preside today over the conferment by the City of Johannesburg has of the title of “Freeman of the City” to one of our most illustrious citizens, Mr Ahmed Kathrada or Uncle “Kathy” as popularly known by his comrades and friends.

This is a rare and distinguished honour bestowed on a remarkable and distinguished gentleman – an icon of our liberation struggle, an international symbol of the universal quest for human rights, a founding

father of our new democracy and a living example of the best and the most honourable that our society can offer.

Mr Kathrada, I believe that it is appropriate that this announcement is being made at this venue, the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication. It is here in Kliptown where you and your colleagues gathered to adopt the Freedom Charter on the 26th of June 1955.

The Freedom Charter talks of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and a prosperous society, as well as one characterised by socio-economic prosperity and advancement. This venue signifies the unmatched contribution of this Stalwart of the liberation movement. It is also a venue that played such a pivotal role in the personal life of Mr Kathrada and a symbolic value in the history of our country's road to democracy.

Madam Speaker, while we are here to celebrate the life and contribution of Mr Kathrada, I believe it is also befitting as this Council to send our heartfelt condolences to the families of those bereft during this week of mourning the deaths of those who lost their lives in Marikana North West Province.

Madam Speaker, as this City confers the Freedom of the City to Mr Kathrada, we recognise the life of one who has dedicated his entire being to social justice, democracy and prosperity for all.

On the news of the City's decision of the conferment the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation had this to say: *"This honour is recognition of the fact that without the sheer commitment, determination, efforts and sacrifice of people such as Mr Kathrada, South Africa would not be enjoying the freedom it now celebrates ... Furthermore, Johannesburg*

would have been a different city – a city struggling to gain legitimacy among the vast majority of its residents as well as internationally.”

In July next year it will be exactly 60 years since Mr Kathrada and 18 other senior members of the ANC's underground structures and the Umkhonto we Sizwe high command were arrested at Liliesleaf Farm by the security police. In what later became known as the Rivonia Trial, ten of these leaders were convicted of high treason and sentenced to long term imprisonment on Robben Island.

Ladies and Gentlemen, speaking at the Inaugural of Ahmad Kathrada Foundation Lecture in October 2010, in Parktown here in Johannesburg, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, summed this up aptly when he remarked: *“Historically, the footprints of Ahmed Kathrada can be found in almost every major struggle in our country, from 1946 to the time of his incarceration in 1963 and beyond.”*

His footprints are those of a selfless cadre of his movement, as an activist against the system of Apartheid, those of a struggle for the emancipation of his people.

Mr Kathrada, it is this values that you continue to espouse that have and continue to inspire us. Following your conviction in the Rivonia Trial Comrade Kathrada, you spent more than 26 years in prison – of which 18 was served on Robben Island. True to your revolutionary nature you used this time to prepare yourself for a leadership role in a new democratic South Africa – a dream which you never abandoned despite the repeated attempts by the Apartheid forces to break your spirit.

In this period you obtained no less than four degrees – BA degrees in History and Criminology and in Bibliography and post-graduate qualifications in History and in African Politics. Upon your release with your fellow comrades, you immediately assumed your rightful roles as the leaders of our people.

Ladies and Gentleman, after the unbanning of the ANC in February 1990, Mr Kathrada served on the interim leadership committees of both the ANC and the SACP and one year later was elected on the ANC's National Executive Committee.

Mr Kathrada was elected as a Member of Parliament in South Africa's first democratically-elected Legislature. He left Parliamentary politics in 1999 and continued to be an influential figure in our public life, amongst others as chairperson of the Robben Island Museum Council, this indeed is a life worthy of recognition and celebration.

Madam Speaker, as a City of Johannesburg, we are humbled to join the many other organisations who have bestowed Mr Kathrada with their highest honours. Amongst these, is the honour of Ikhamanga of the Republic, Isitwalandwe by the African National Congress, Honorary Doctorates by many institutions and many other national and international awards.

As you assume the mantle of Freeman of the City of Johannesburg, you join your long term comrades and friends like former President Nelson Mandela who is the only other living Freeman of the City. It is therefore appropriate to recall Mr Mandela's words at the opening of the Ahmad Kathrada Foundation in 2007: *"We have spoken often of the long road Kathy and I have travelled together. As a young man he gave up*

opportunities open to him and instead devoted himself to the struggle against apartheid, knowing that this would cost him his own freedom. We value his dedication and his integrity. His efforts and those of many others in all communities of our country played a significant role in achieving the democracy we enjoy today.”

The other luminaries you are joining are the late Mr Walter Sisulu, Dr Beyers Naude and Mr Joe Slovo.

So Madam Speaker, it is our collective responsibility as Councillors in the City of Johannesburg to take forward the values of service to the people as the life of Mr Kathrada has been about. We have a duty to continue enhancing our democracy and striving towards prosperity for all.

Mr Kathrada, let me take this opportunity on this day the 21st of August 2012, to also wish you a happy birthday. Almost all the 83 years of your life you have been about the service to our people.

We wish you good health and congratulate you for being awarded the Freeman of the City Johannesburg.

Thank you.

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