

HONORARY GRADUATE

MAX ULYATE WALTER SISULU

Max Ulyate Walter Sisulu was born in 1912 in the Transkei. His formal education ended after Standard 4 when he started work in a Johannesburg dairy. He later worked in the gold mines, as a domestic worker, and as a factory worker. From 1940, he helped to organise workers in Johannesburg and was involved in several strikes. He also campaigned against the recruitment of Africans into the army.

Walter Sisulu joined the African National Congress in 1940 and was a founder member of the ANC Youth League. In 1946 he was elected to the ANC Transvaal Executive and, in December 1949, was elected Secretary-General. In 1950, he represented the ANC on a co-ordinating committee with the South African Indian Congress to lead a national work stoppage on 26 June in protest against apartheid legislation.

Through the 1950s, he worked full time for the ANC with responsibility for the day-to-day management of the organisation. One of the accused in the lengthy Treason Trial, he was placed under house arrest when the ANC was banned in 1960. A founder member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, he was arrested on 11 July 1963 and was sentenced to life imprisonment for planning acts of sabotage.

Walter Sisulu is regarded as one of the three most important black political leaders to have emerged in South Africa since the Second World War, the other two being Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo who he was instrumental in recruiting into the ANC, serving as their mentor and supporting and encouraging their legal and political careers. Extremely influential among his peers, he was the key figure in the 1950s in shifting younger ANC leaders from their initial 'Africanist' stance towards a more racially inclusive notion of African nationalism. He was largely responsible for developing the framework of multiracial political alliance within which the ANC functioned in the 1950s and which is reflected in its eclectic leadership today.

Released from prison in 1989, he played a vital role in the events leading up to the unbanning of the ANC in 1990. In 1993 he was elected Deputy President of the ANC, a position he held until 1997. Though ill health has prevented him in recent years from playing an active role in the affairs of the ANC, he remains a leading member of the organisation.

He is the former Chancellor of the University of Venda and has received the highest honour in the land - 'Isithwalandwe'.

It is fitting that Max Ulyate Walter Sisulu, a great political leader who, through decades of persecution has never wavered in his devotion to democracy and equality, should be honoured by this University with the award of its highest accolade, the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.