

A black and white close-up portrait of Winnie Madikizela Mandela. She is wearing a light-colored headscarf with a dark band. Her expression is serious and contemplative. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

# WINNIE MADIKIZELA MANDELA

1936 - 2018

# THE MOST POWERFUL WOMAN IN SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS DURING THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE – WINNIE MANDELA

WINNIE MADIKIZELA MANDELA



Born into a royal family as Nomzamo Winifred Zanyiwe Madikizela on 26 September 1935 in the village of Mbhongweni in Bizana, Pondoland in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. Madikizela-Mandela became well-known as she was the second wife of South Africa's first black president, Nelson Mandela.

Madikizela-Mandela was the fifth of nine children. She had seven sisters and a brother and the parents were both teachers. Her father, Columbus was a history teacher and later a headmaster, her mother, Gertrude was a domestic science teacher. Her mom passed on when Madikizela-Mandela was only nine years old and reportedly led to the break-up of the family when the children were sent to live with different relatives. Despite that, Madikizela-Mandela rose to become the head-girl at her high school in Bizana.

Upon completing her high school, Madikizela-Mandela studied social work at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1956. She also completed a bachelor's degree in international relations from the same university.

Madikizela-Mandela met lawyer and anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela in 1957, when he was still married to Evelyn Mase. She was 22 years old and standing at a bus stop in Soweto when Mandela first saw her and charmed her, securing a lunch date the following week. The couple married in 1958 and had two daughters, Zenani (born 1958) and Zindziswa (born 1960). Mandela was arrested and jailed in 1963, and was not released until 1990.





*"TO THOSE WHO OPPOSE US, WE SAY, 'STRIKE  
THE WOMAN, AND YOU STRIKE THE ROCK'.  
— 1966*

It was between 1963 and 1990 that Madikizela-Mandela's leadership as a woman activist, a wife of Mandela was tested in the liberation struggle and she was enemy number one of the apartheid government for many years. Many social commentators have claimed, if it was not for Madikizela-Mandela's fierce political understanding and revolutionary conduct, the world would not have known the name Nelson Mandela and the iconic leader she quietly built while he was incarcerated. It was her role as the wife of the now world famous political prisoner and statesman that brought Madikizela-Mandela. It was mama's work post the famous Rivonia Trial in which her husband and other were sentenced to life in prison that she became the face of the entire South African struggle for emancipation within their political movement, the African National Congress (ANC) within the South African borders. The ANC was banned and many of its leaders were in exile in many parts of Africa and the world.



***BLACK/WHITE***





Due to her political activities, she was arrested and jailed at several occasions and the longest was 491 days in prison. She subsequently has a book in her own account named: 491 Days: Prison Number 1323/69. This prison sentence started on 12 May 1969 at Pretoria Central Prison where she spent months in solitary confinement and was also tortured and beaten. On her own account, this prison experience “hardened” her.

Winnie Mandela



From 1977 to 1985, Madikizela-Mandela was banished to the town of Brandfort in the central province of South Africa, today known as the Orange Free State and confined to the area. It was during these years that she became known in the Western world. Other activities included starting a creche with non-government organisation, Operation Hunger as well as opened a clinic in Brandfort with Dr. Abu Baker Asvat, her personal physician. Madikizela-Mandela also campaigned actively for equal rights and was promoted as a symbol of their struggle against apartheid. Many community members in Brandfort who attempted to assist her, were harassed by the brutal apartheid police.



In late 1985, Madikizela-Mandela returned to Soweto in Johannesburg. At this stage, the anti-apartheid struggle took a different twist as many youth of Soweto and other parts of the country had left the country to join the military wing of the ANC's underground military operations in various frontline states implementing various military operations inside the borders of South Africa. During her banishment, the "Release Mandela Campaign" had taken off internationally. On the home front, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) were established and formed a mass-movement against the apartheid regime. The new organisations relied more heavily on collective decision-making structures, rather than on individual charisma. Meanwhile, back in Soweto, Madikizela-Mandela established the Mandela United Football Club (MUFC) between 1986 and 1989 which was a militaristic approach to fight the last hold of white minority rule in South Africa. Madikizela-Mandela and her "footballers" dressed in camouflage military garb, surrounded with bodyguards this upset the apartheid government. Members of the MUFC lived in the home of Madikizela-Mandela and became involved in kidnapping, torture and murder.



Madikizela-Mandela was implicated in 15 deaths during this period. In 1988, Madikizela-Mandela's home was burnt by high school pupils in Soweto, in retaliation for the alleged actions of the MUFC. The UDF in 1989 after appeals from the local community, disowned Madikizela-Mandela for allegedly violating human rights violations in the name of the struggle against apartheid. The ANC in exile issued a statement criticising her judgement, after she refused to heed instructions, issued from prison by Nelson Mandela, to dissociate herself from the MUFC. An ANC crisis committee failed at mediation attempts. At this stage, Madikizela-Mandela was the biggest force inside South Africa fighting the last days of the apartheid government.

During South Africa's transition to multi-racial democracy, she adopted a far less conciliatory attitude to white South Africans and was considered to be as controversial as her husband was before his arrest.

Madikizela-Mandela was seen on her husband's arm when he was released in February 1990, the first time the couple had been seen in public for nearly 30 years.

However, their 38-year marriage ended in April 1992 after rumours of unfaithfulness. Their divorce was finalised in March 1996. She then adopted the surname "Madikizela-Mandela". Also in 1992, she lost her position as the head of the ANC social welfare department, amid various allegations from her detractors inside the party.

Madikizela-Mandela actively campaigned for the ANC in South Africa's first non-racial elections. She was appointed Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in May 1994.

She remained extremely popular amongst many ANC supporters. In December 1993 and April 1997, she was elected president of the ANC Women's League, although she withdrew her candidacy for ANC Deputy President at the movement's Mahikeng conference in December 1997.

After an absence in active politics, it was in 2003 that Madikizela-Mandela offered to act as a human shield prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Also in 2003, she helped defuse a hostage situation at Wits University, where a student who was in arrears with fees took a staff member hostage at knifepoint.





When the ANC announced the election of its National Executive Committee on 21 December 2007, Madikizela-Mandela placed first with 2,845 votes. Madikizela-Mandela criticised the anti-immigrant violence also named xenophobic attacks between May and June of 2008 that began in Johannesburg and spread throughout the country, and blamed the government's lack of suitable housing provisions for the sentiments behind the riots. She apologised to the victims of the riots and visited the Alexandra township in Johannesburg. She offered her home as shelter for an immigrant family from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Madikizela-Mandela secured fifth place on the ANC's electoral list for the 2009 general election behind then party president, Jacob Zuma who later became the country's president. At the public funeral service, held at the Orlando Stadium, a stone was thrown away from her Orlando West home, ANC and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa "acknowledged" that the ANC failed to stand by Madikizela-Mandela's side during her legal troubles. Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) delivered an impassioned speech in which he criticised the United Democratic Front for distancing themselves from Madikizela-Mandela in the 1980s. Malema also criticised members of the National Executive Committee of the ANC Women's League for resigning in 1995, because they regarded Madikizela-Mandela as a "criminal". Madikizela-Mandela's daughter Zenani attacked those who "vilified" her mother, calling them hypocrites.



***TIMELINE.***



**September 26, 1936:**

Winnie Madikizela Mandela is born in Bizana, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

**1957:**

Winnie Madikizela graduates with a degree in social work from the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg.

**1958:**

Winnie Madikizela meets Nelson Mandela at a bus stop in Soweto.

**1958-1962:**

Winnie Madikizela and Nelson Mandela date and eventually get married.

**1962-1990:**

Nelson Mandela is imprisoned on Robben Island for his political activities, leaving Winnie Madikizela to become a prominent figure in the anti-apartheid struggle.

**1976:**

Winnie Madikizela plays a significant role in the Soweto Uprising, which leads to her being banned and placed under house arrest for several years.

**1986:**

Winnie Madikizela is implicated in the kidnapping and murder of 14-year-old Stompie Seipei, leading to widespread controversy and criticism.





**1990:**

Nelson Mandela is released from prison, and Winnie Madikizela is reunited with him.

**1991:**

Winnie Madikizela and Nelson Mandela separate due to marital problems, infidelity, and controversy.

**1994:**

Nelson Mandela becomes the first democratically elected president of South Africa, and Winnie Madikizela serves as a member of parliament in his government.



**1996:**

Winnie Madikizela is convicted of fraud and theft and resigns from parliament.

**1998:**

Winnie Madikizela is expelled from the African National Congress (ANC) due to controversy surrounding her political and personal life.



**2003:**

Winnie Madikizela is re-elected to parliament and serves until 2009.

**April 2, 2018:**

Winnie Madikizela Mandela passes away at the age of 81 in Johannesburg, South Africa.



# RESOURCES

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnie\\_Madikizela-Mandela](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnie_Madikizela-Mandela)



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