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THE PRISON LETTERS OF NELSON MANDELA

Edited by Sahn Venter

Foreword by Zamaswazi Dlamini-Mandela

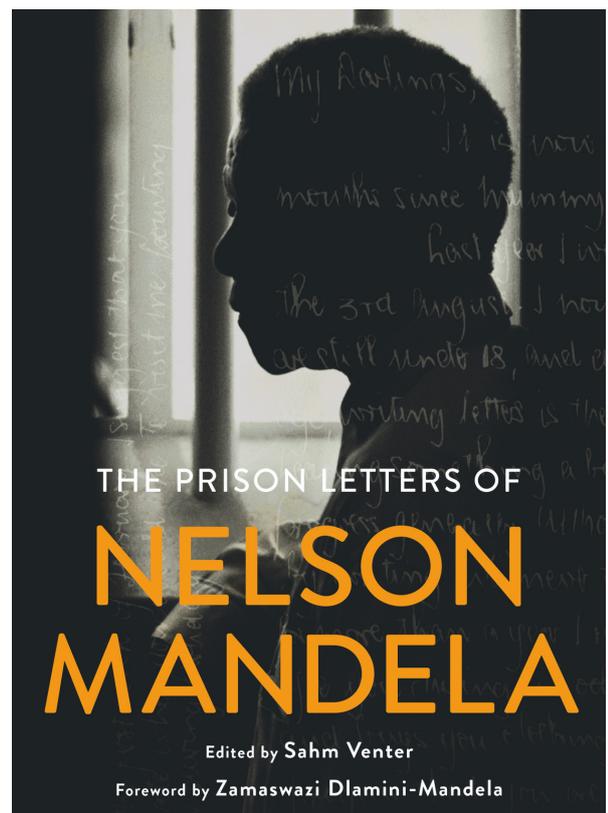
To be published upon the centenary of his birth, *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela* is a landmark work: the first, and only, authorised and authenticated collection of correspondence spanning the twenty-seven years Mandela was held as a political prisoner

Poignant, impassioned, gripping, and always inspirational, the letters – many of them never before seen by the public – have been assembled from the collections held by the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the South African National Archives among others.

On 12 June 1964, Mandela – then serving a five-year sentence at a Pretoria prison – would learn the apartheid government had no intention of ever setting him free. Brought up on charges of sabotage and now sentenced to life, Mandela and six others were led to the notorious maximum security compound on Robben Island, where harsh physical conditions and brutal enforcement combined to systematically dehumanise inmates. Denis Goldberg, the only white person convicted and sentenced to life with Mandela was sent to Pretoria to serve his sentence as apartheid regulations prevented him from being imprisoned with his black comrades. Decades later, despite enduring three other prisons and a life-threatening illness, Mandela would prove his captors wrong. *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela* is a testament of his defiance and his resolve.

During his incarceration, Mandela would pen a multitude of letters to loved ones, compatriots, prison authorities, and government officials. At first he was only allowed to write and receive one letter of five hundred words every six months. Even when restrictions were finally loosened regarding the length and regularity of his correspondence, his jailors continued censoring his letters for political overtones – even innocuous references. The ultimate output reflects the famed Mandela wilfulness and resilience; here every word is chosen as if his life depended upon it.

Illustrated with facsimiles and generously annotated, the book covers every aspect of life behind bars for the future South African leader, and provides new insight into how Mandela maintained his inner spirits while living in almost complete isolation and how he engaged with an outside world that became increasingly outraged by his plight, as his imprisonment dragged into its fourth decade.



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Mandela's letters are organised chronologically and divided by the four prison venues in which he was incarcerated as a sentenced prisoner from 1962 to 1990: Pretoria Local Prison, Robben Island Prison, Pollsmoor Prison, and Victor Verster Prison. The book provides an intimate portrait of a political activist who was as much a devoted husband, adoring father, dedicated student (studying for a law degree behind bars), and abiding friend. A father of five when he was sentenced to life imprisonment, his letters home became a critical means of parenting in absentia—particularly as he was denied visitation rights until his children had reached the age of sixteen. Letters to comrades and old acquaintances are infused with optimism and warmth, as well as a steely resolve to stay the course. Mandela reminisces and often frets over the future, yet never loses hope.

He is witty, clever (often cloaking references to banned colleagues through nicknames), and empathic with others despite his own tribulations and tragedies, like the death of his mother and son, over which he anguished. And a new portrait emerges of his close relationship with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, whose own battle with the apartheid system during the same period is documented dramatically through their letters. In them Mandela professes his love, but also a deep appreciation and moral support for her efforts on behalf of the movement.

SAHM VENTER worked as a journalist for over twenty years, mainly covering the anti-apartheid struggle, including Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 for the Associated Press and South Africa's transition to democracy. Venter was a member of the editorial team for Nelson Mandela's books *Conversations with Myself* and *Dare Not Linger: The Presidential Years*. She has edited and co-authored a number of books with some of South Africa's most prominent freedom fighters including Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Ahmed Kathrada. She is currently senior researcher at the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

ZAMASWAZI DLAMINI-MANDELA is a granddaughter of Nelson Mandela and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. She works as a business developer and is a public speaker and entrepreneur. Through her public speaking she is endeavoring to promote her grandparents' legacy by sharing their message of youth empowerment through education, with a particular focus on gender equality.

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