

Elinor Sisulu



[African Feminist Thinkers: Our Voices](#) [1]

Elinor Sisulu is a writer, human rights activist and political analyst. She was born in Harare, Zimbabwe in March 1958 and grew up mostly in Bulawayo.

She combines training in history, English literature, development studies and feminist theory. She completed her first two degrees at the University of Zimbabwe and studied at the United Nations Institute for Economic Planning and Development (IDEP) in Dakar, Senegal. From 1984-85 she studied for a MA in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies at the Hague. During her stint in Holland she met her future husband, ANC activist Max Sisulu, who was at the recipient of the Govan Mbeki fellowship at the University of Amsterdam.

Elinor worked in the Ministry of Labour in Zimbabwe for several years. As an academic researcher in the Department of Research and Development she published studies of women's work and development assistance in Zimbabwe. This included a major study for NORAD that was later published by SAPES in the form of a book entitled *Women in Zimbabwe*. She then worked for the International Labour Organisation's Lusaka Office from 1987 to 1990 on ILO programmes of assistance to the ANC, PAC and SWAPO. In 1991, after her husband was able to go back to South Africa after two decades in exile, she moved with her family to Johannesburg.

From 1991 to 1998 she worked as a freelance writer and editor, except for a short stint when she was Assistant Editor for SPEAK, a black feminist publication. In 1994 she wrote an award winning children's book about the first democratic elections in South Africa entitled *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*. The book has been recently selected by the Librarian's Association of South Africa (LIASA) as one of the ten best books representing South African democracy. She was the chairperson of the Advisory Committee of the Centre for the Book from 1997 and in June 2003 was elected chairperson of the Book Development Forum of South Africa. She is passionate about children's literature and has been instrumental in setting up a Children's Literature Network in South Africa.

In 1993 a fellowship at the prestigious Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, enabled her to start researching and writing the biography of Walter and Albertina Sisulu. *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* was published in December 2002 to critical acclaim. The book was runner up in the Sunday Times Alan Paton Non-Fiction

Award and winner of the prestigious 2003 Noma Award for publishing in Africa . Time Warner Books published the book in the UK in November 2003.

In April 2003 Elinor was commissioned by the Independent Electoral Authority of South Africa to write the report on the Africa Conference on Elections, Democracy and Governance in Africa. In August 2003, in her capacity as a resource person to Themba Lesizwe, the South African Network of Trauma Service Providers, she helped plan and organise a symposium on Civil Society and Justice in Zimbabwe held in Johannesburg from 11-13 August 2003. From May to June 2004 she carried out the first phase of a study for the World Food Programme (WFP) on how to introduce advocacy on HIV/AIDS, nutrition and education at WFP food distribution sites in Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia and Angola.

Since 2003 Elinor has been advising on projects on democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. She is currently the Media and Advocacy manager of the Crisis Coalition of Zimbabwe's Johannesburg office, which she was instrumental in establishing in 2004.

Elinor is a member of the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA) board, the National Arts Festival board, the Independent Media Trust of Zimbabwe, and the Anthony Sampson board. She is also a trustee of the Heal Zimbabwe Trust, a South African-based trust that facilitates humanitarian assistance for Zimbabwean refugees in South Africa.

Publications

- Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime, David Philip, 2002.
- The 50th anniversary of the women's march: a personal recollection
- A different kind of holocaust: a personal reflection on HIV/AIDS

Article for This Day

- The Day Gogo Went to Vote, Little Brown & Co, Boston and London, April 1996 and Tafelberg, Cape Town, April 1997.
- Numerous articles in major South African publications ? FEMINA, TRIBUTE, SPEAK, The Teacher, ?O? Magazine, SIYAYA, African Gender Institute Newsletter.
- With M. Mwalo, Women in Zimbabwe, Southern African Political Economy Series, Harare, 1989.
- With M. Mwalo and K. Truscott, Women in Zimbabwe : The Heritage and the Struggle in Zimbabwe Prospects, by C. Stoneman (ed.), McMillan, 1988.
- Employment Strategies for Women in Kenya during the UN Decade for Women: A Critique , research paper written in partial fulfilment of MA Degree, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands.
- Female Labour in Zimbabwe: Reflections on NMS findings, MISS magazine, Harare, April 1983.

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