

GUIDELINE FOR SUBMISSIONS TO CoJ:

27 September 2024

Leila Khaled is a multiple living icon: for women's emancipation; for the Palestinian struggle for human dignity and self-determination and for international solidarity and social justice.

Khaled is held in high esteem in the Majority World and was embraced by Nelson Mandela when she first visited South Africa in 2006. Mandela, who was also called a "terrorist" by many leaders in the West, rejoiced in meeting Khaled and spoke for most South Africans when he expressed his appreciation for Khaled; her organisation's concrete support for our liberation; and his admiration for her courage, sacrifices and fortitude. He viewed her as a symbol of the struggle against oppression throughout the world and an inspiration for South Africans fighting against Apartheid.

On her last visit to South Africa, in October 2023, former Minister (in both the Mandela and Mbeki governments) Ronnie Kasrils, an erstwhile liberation struggle hero of Jewish background shared a platform with Khaled and his words resonated with the massive audience: "I had known her previously and she is as impressive as ever, maintaining a calm and dignified presence, whilst brilliantly recounting the dispossession of her family and people, her experiences and motivation for lifelong involvement in the resistance struggle. I was struck then, as I had been on previous occasions when we had met, by her quiet modesty, dignity and irrepressible courage and resolve..."

The renaming of Sandton Drive occurs at a time when the judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in a near unanimous decision, considered Israel to be plausibly committing a genocide - considered to be the "crime of all crimes" - as defined in Article 1 of the Genocide Convention. The ICJ's order comes after all reputable international human rights organisations have already conclusively shown that Israel is in violation of the UN Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

The legal case brought to the ICJ by South Africa has been joined by many countries around the world on every continent and has tremendously increased South Africa's stature, prestige and its stance on social justice. The renaming of Sandton Drive will have a similar global impact for the City of Johannesburg.

Khaled is a prominent leader in the Palestinian women's movement, and in a range of social and humanitarian activities. She is a prominent speaker internationally, a journalist for the Palestinian media, an organiser of health services to her wounded and maimed people, an educator, a guardian of schoolchildren and a comforter to the loved ones of those who have lost their lives. Such a multiplicity of roles is testament to her extraordinary talents and consistent service to people of all generations over the years.

Whilst Israel and its supporters have attempted to portray her as an unrepentant terrorist, millions hail her as the noble freedom fighter she is. For us the state violence of the oppressor cannot be equated with the resistance of the oppressed.

Where we, including our heroes like Mandela and Hani, along with the likes of Leila, had to reluctantly and as a last resort turn to arm struggle, the objective was and is to create a society based on peace, justice and humanitarian morality. This is why South Africans and the diverse solidarity movement in the country, are so clear in our support for the Palestinian cause, and why Leila is always hailed as a true heroine who continues to inspire us as she does people who value freedom and independence everywhere in the world.

For these reasons, the renaming of Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive will be an inspired and appropriate decision by the citizens of Johannesburg.

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