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RUTH FIRST PAPERS PROJECT PREPARES TO LAUNCH IN LONDON WITH A MEMORIAL FOR RUTH FIRST'S LIFE AND WORK

Anti-apartheid and human rights campaigners, friends, family and colleagues will gather in Bloomsbury on the 7th of June to remember the life and work of Ruth First, 30 years on from her assassination at the hands of the South African apartheid government.

Ruth First was an anti-apartheid activist, journalist and scholar. She was born in South Africa in 1925 and worked as a journalist until 1964. Having been detained in solitary confinement under South Africa's notorious '90 day' laws, an experience she wrote about in her book *117 Days*, Ruth went into exile, settling in London with her husband, Joe Slovo, and three daughters. The family lived there between 1966 and 1978, when Ruth moved to Mozambique to help establish the Centro de Estudos Africanos at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane with Aquino Braganca. She was murdered in Maputo in 1982 by a letter bomb sent by the South African government. Her books include *Libya: the Elusive Revolution* and *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'État*.

Justice Albie Sachs, Gillian Slovo, Alpheus Manghezi and Don Pinnock, among others, will speak at the event at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London. The speakers will remember Ruth's time as a journalist in South Africa, her work at UK universities and her pivotal role in establishing the Centro de Estudos Africanos in Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo. Gillian Slovo, Ruth's daughter, author and memoirist, said, "We, Ruth's three daughters, are delighted that Ruth's work, still so relevant today, will be the subject of this conference. Ruth was passionate about achieving justice in South Africa but she was also an internationalist and so it is also wonderful that the digitisation of her papers will make her considerable body of work available all over the world".

The event will also launch the Ruth First Papers project, which will digitise the archives of Ruth's writings and correspondence held at the University of London, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane and the University of the Western Cape, and make them accessible online and for free. The material in the collection includes some of Ruth's most important writing on Libya, coups d'état and decolonial politics. Sitting in files in library archives, the material is only available to a few researchers. This project will make a resource that can be accessed by anyone, bringing the material to a much wider audience. The project has so far published three of Ruth's books online, along with over 500 pages of additional material.

In the year after Ruth's death in 1982, there was a call to establish a memorial resource to share Ruth's research, activism and journalism with a new generation of scholars. Thirty years on, the Ruth First Papers project represents the start of that project, sharing Ruth's vital contributions on African politics with a new audience. Dr Leo Zeilig, director of the

project, said, "The event on 7 June will be the largest celebration of this extraordinary South African revolutionary for thirty years. Many of Ruth First's closest friends, family and comrades will come together to discuss her work and legacy".

Notes

1. *The Ruth First Papers project is funded by the School of Advanced Study and in partnership with the UWC/Robben Island Mayibuye Archives and the Centro de Estudos Africanos at UEM. More information is available at www.ruthfirstpapers.org.uk.*

2. *Ruth First was an anti-apartheid activist, journalist and scholar. She was born in South Africa in 1925 and worked as a journalist until 1964, when she moved to London with her husband, Joe Slovo, and three daughters. She worked as a lecturer at the University of Durham and in 1977 moved to Mozambique to help establish the Centro de Estudos Africanos at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane with Aquino Braganca. She was murdered in Maputo in 1982 by a letter bomb sent by the South African government. Her books include *Libya: the Elusive Revolution* and *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'État*.*

3. *Justice Albie Sachs is a renowned human rights activist and former South Africa Constitutional Court judge. His career in human rights activism started at the age of seventeen, when as a second year law student at the University of Cape Town, he took part in the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign. Three years later he attended the Congress of the People at Kliptown where the Freedom Charter was adopted. He started practice as an advocate at the Cape Bar aged 21. The bulk of his work involved defending people charged under racist statutes and repressive security laws. Many faced the death sentence. He himself was raided by the security police, subjected to banning orders restricting his movement and eventually placed in solitary confinement without trial for two prolonged spells of detention. In 1966 he went into exile. After spending eleven years studying and teaching law in England he worked for a further eleven years in Mozambique as law professor and legal researcher. In 1988 he was blown up by a bomb placed in his car in Maputo by South African security agents, losing an arm and the sight of an eye. During the 1980s working closely with Oliver Tambo, leader of the ANC in exile, he helped draft the organisation's Code of Conduct, as well as its statutes. After recovering from the bomb he devoted himself fulltime to preparations for a new democratic Constitution for South Africa. He set up the South African Constitutional Studies Centre at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, after he came out of the London Hospital in 1988, transferring it to the University of the Western Cape in 1991. In 1990 he returned home and as a member of the Constitutional Committee and the National Executive of the ANC took an active part in the negotiations which led to South Africa becoming a constitutional democracy. After the first democratic election in 1994 he was appointed by President Nelson Mandela to serve on the newly established Constitutional Court.*

4. *Gillian Slovo is a novelist, playwright and memoirist working in London. She is Ruth First's daughter. Her novels include *Red Dust* and *Ice Road*. Her 1997 memoir, *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*, is an account of her childhood in South Africa and her relationship with her parents Joe Slovo and Ruth First — both famous South Africans and major figures in the anti-apartheid struggle who lived perilous lives of exile, armed resistance, and occasional imprisonment, which culminated in her mother's murder by South African forces in 1982. A family memoir in the form of a feature film, *A World Apart*, was written by her sister Shawn Slovo and starred Barbara Hershey. With Victoria Brittain, she compiled the play *Guantanamo- Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* that was put on in theatres all over the world.*

5. The symposium will include the following speakers:

General Introduction by Albie Sachs

Ruth First the Writer and Activist:

Victoria Brittain, Don Pinnock, Jimi Adesina, John Saul

The Ruth First Papers project

Leo Zeilig, Peter Webster, Matt Mahon

In exile: revolutionary scholarship and teaching 1964-1978:

Peter Dwyer, Lionel Cliffe, Barbara Harlow, Alan Wieder

The Mozambique Years: 1977-1982:

Matt Mahon, Colin Darch, Anna Maria Gentili, Marc Wuyts

Remembering Ruth:

Shula Marks, Bridget O'Laughlin, Gillian Slovo, Alpheus Manghezi

Book Launch for Ruth First: Voices of Liberation (Don Pinnock)

6. For more information email Matt Mahon, Ruth First Papers research assistant, at matt.mahon@sas.ac.uk or telephone [+44 \(0\)20 7862 8846](tel:+442078628846).