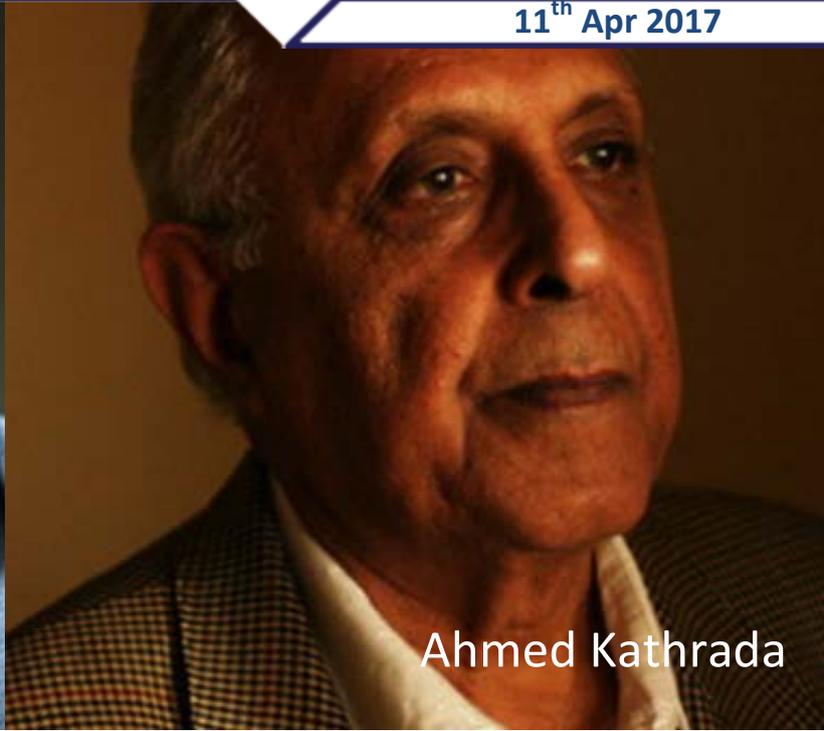
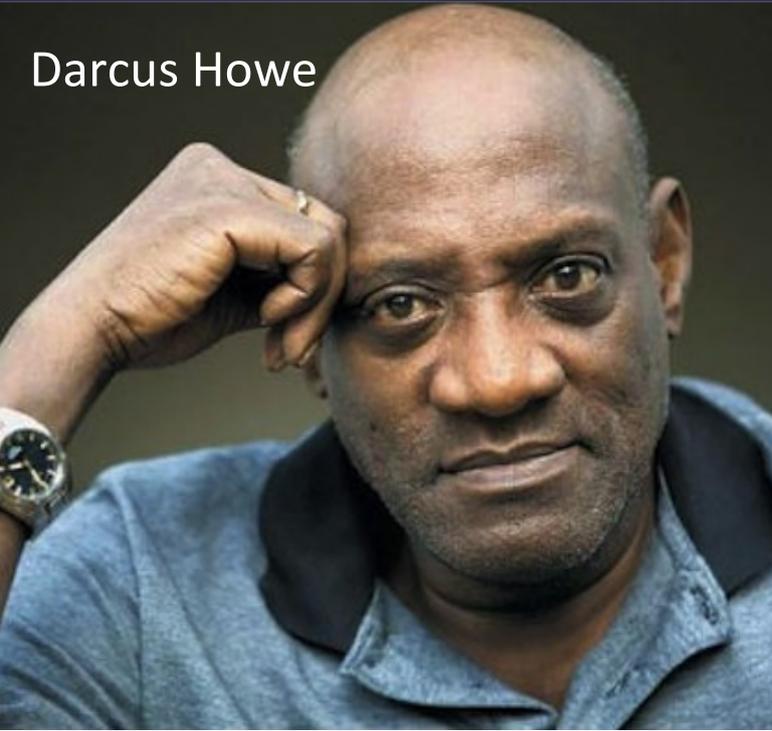


Darcus Howe



Ahmed Kathrada

Legacy of Darcus Howe & Ahmed Kathrada

By Imam Shakeel Begg

I recently heard of the death of two great activist leaders, Darcus Howe and Ahmed Kathrada.

Ahmed Kathrada was a Muslim, an iconic figure, and a comrade of the great Nelson Mandela. Alongside Mandela, he took up the challenge against injustice and Apartheid in South Africa, and around the world. Mr Kathrada spent 26 years of his life in prison, 18 of which were on Robben Island with Mandela and other African National Congress members.

Ahmed Kathrada died on the 28th of March 2017 at the age of 87.

Darcus Howe was closer to home to me, as I grew-up in the London Borough of Lewisham where the New Cross Fire took place in 1981, ending the young lives of 13 Black children. I used to walk past that very same house with many of my friends, discussing what had happened.

Darcus Howe, initially a member of the Black Panther Party in UK, was not a Muslim but he must have studied the Black Panther Movement and realised that Rap Brown - now known as Imam Jamil Al Amin - and others in the Party were Muslims. In fact, the party's inception was inspired by the great Muslim and Martyr, Malcolm X.

He also led the march in the London Borough of Lewisham against the Far-Right, National Front in 1977 which became the iconic 'Battle for Lewisham'. At this time I was still a young child in the Borough but memories of this march still resonate.

On the 1st of April 2017, Mr Darcus Howe passed away at the age of 74.

Even though Darcus Howe was not a Muslim he, like Ahmed Kathrada, understood the Islamic doctrine that a proper balance-of-evils analysis, that takes into account the utmost importance of realising justice, will favour withstanding the harms of resistance until the tyranny and oppression which has paralysed a people is completely eliminated.

Darcus Howe
at a rally in
Lewisham.



As an Imam and community member in the London Borough of Lewisham, I would like us to remember these two iconic leaders; and also for us to realise and understand that standing-up to injustice, oppression, racism is not only a part of a Muslim's faith, but are a duty of a Muslim.

Anytime that I think of a minority community at any point in history whose physical and mental integrity, life and safety; protection from discrimination, freedoms of thought and conscience, I think of the blessed Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions and in fact, the struggles of all the Anbiya (Prophets) because they were always the minority community who were always made out to be the enemy of the state by the tyrannical, oppressive authorities of their respective times. It is for this reason that when I think of the many marches and demonstrations that these two men attended in the face of violence being exacted against them, I think of the act which the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) had carried out along with his companions when 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) had embraced Islam and urged the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) that the handful of the Muslim community openly proclaim the noble cause publicly such that they went out in two groups, the Prophet's uncle, Humzah (may Allah be pleased with him) leading one group and 'Umar the other where they marched in broad daylight to the Ka'ba in front of their protagonists, the Quraysh.

To all Muslims living in such precarious times, I would like to remind you that we have much to learn from the struggles of these two great individuals and their ability to mobilise and actively and effectively carry out non-violent protests to demand equal rights, a level playing field and, above all, the right of dignity and respect.

If we remember them today, it's because of the sacrifices that they made, sacrifices that required courage in the face of fear and tyranny, and resolute steadfastness in the face of popularism which meant that they were in their times, despised and hated. They unwillingly invited upon themselves scorn in their struggle for justice rather than being apologists and abandoning their cause. And when many witnessed the beauty of forbearance and the many sacrifices of activists like Ahmed Kathrada, Darcus Howe and others like them, people of the opposite race with strong souls became attracted to the cause, just like how the self-control, restraint and tolerance shown by the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings be upon him) and the early generation of Muslims encouraged many to embrace Islam.



Ahmed Kathrada standing next to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu.

In remembering both Ahmed Kathrada and, more specifically, Darcus Howe, we remember that in Lewisham, we have a history of standing up against those who would like to create hate and division.

Allah Almighty states in the Qur'an: *"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts); lest you swerve, and if you distort justice or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do."* [Chapter 4 Verse 135)

Thus, we are told that Great Prophets of old - Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad - May Allah's Peace and Blessings be on all of them - all stood up against the oppression and injustice of their times, be it Nimrod, Pharaoh, Romans or the Quraysh.

So let us not be paralysed by fear in speaking the truth, enjoining the good, calling to what is right and demanding our rights for indeed as Prophet Muhammad - May Allah's Peace and Blessing Be Upon him - that always inspires me: **"The Greatest form of *Jihad (struggle) is to stand-up against a Tyrant"**.

*PLEASE NOTE: * "The reference here is with respect to a legitimate and correctly constituted noble Jihad in accordance with the strict rules of Islam".*

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