

Chris Hani



My Life

An Autobiography Written In 1991

Chris Hani, born on 28 June 1942, in Cofimvaba, Transkei. General-Secretary of the SACP since December 1991 and ANC NEC member since 1974.

Matriculated at Lovedale, 1958; Universities Rhodes and Fort Hare - 1959/61, BA Latin and English. Joined ANC Youth League 1957.

Active in Eastern and Western Cape ANC before leaving SA in 1962.

Commissar in the Luthuli Detachment joint ANC/ZAPU military campaign 1967, escaped to Botswana, returned from Botswana to Zambia 1968, infiltrated SA in 1973 and then based in Lesotho.

Left Maseru for Lusaka in 1982 after several unsuccessful assassination attempts. Commissar and Deputy Commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe, armed wing of ANC. Chief of Staff, MK 1987.

The following brief autobiographical account was written by comrade Chris Hani in February 1991.

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I was born in a small rural town in the Transkei called Cofimvaba. This town is almost 200 kilometres from East London. I am the fifth child in a family of six. Only three of us are still surviving, the other three died in their infancy. My mother is completely illiterate and my father semi-literate. My father was a migrant worker in the mines in the Transvaal, but he subsequently became an unskilled worker in the building industry.

Life was quite harsh for us and we went through some hard times as our mother had to supplement the family budget through subsistence farming; had to bring us up with very little assistance from my father who was always away working for the white capitalists.

I had to walk twenty kilometres to school every five days and then walk the same distance to church every Sunday. At the age of eight I was already an altar boy in the Catholic Church and was quite devout.

After finishing my primary school education I had a burning desire to become a priest but this was vetoed by my father.

In 1954, while I was doing my secondary education, the apartheid regime introduced Bantu Education which was designed to indoctrinate Black pupils to accept and recognise the supremacy of the white man over the blacks in all spheres. This angered and outraged us and paved the way for my involvement in the struggle.

The arraignment for Treason of the ANC leaders in 1956 convinced me to join the ANC and participate in the struggle for freedom. In 1957 I made up my mind and joined the ANC Youth League. I was fifteen then, and since politics was proscribed at African schools our activities were clandestine. In 1959 I went over to university at Fort Hare where I became openly involved in the struggle, as Fort Hare was a liberal campus. It was here that I got exposed to Marxist ideas and the scope and nature of the racist capitalist system. My conversion to Marxism also deepened my non-racial perspective.

My early Catholicism led to my fascination with Latin studies and English literature. These studies in these two courses were gobbled up by me and I became an ardent lover of English, Latin and Greek literature, both modern and classical. My studies of literature further strengthened my hatred of all forms of oppression, persecution and obscurantism. The action of tyrants as portrayed in various literary works also made me hate tyranny and institutionalised oppression.

In 1961 I joined the underground South African Communist Party as I realised that national liberation, though essential, would not bring about total economic liberation. My decision to join the Party was influenced by such greats of our struggle like Govan Mbeki, Bram Fischer, JB Marks, Moses Kotane, Ray Simons, etc.

In 1962, having recognised the intransigence of the racist regime, I joined the fledgling MK. This was the beginning of my long road in the armed struggle in which there have been three abortive assassination attempts against me personally. The armed struggle, which we never regarded as exclusive, as we combined it with other forms of struggle, has brought about the present crisis of apartheid.

In 1967 I fought together with ZIPRA forces in Zimbabwe as political commissar. In 1974 I went back to South Africa to build the underground and I subsequently left for Lesotho where I operated underground and contributed in the building of the ANC underground inside our country.

The four pillars underpinning our struggle have brought about the present crisis of the apartheid regime. The racist regime has reluctantly recognised the legitimacy of our struggle by agreeing to sit down with us to discuss how to begin the negotiations process.

In the current political situation, the decision by our organisation to suspend armed action is correct and is an important contribution in maintaining the momentum of negotiation.

**Chris Hani,
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