

George Bizos lived for 92 eventful and productive years: this brief obituary is a selective summary of his achievements and work, with and for many remarkable people. The following is an abbreviated version of the long version of his obituary of his very full and productive life.

George was born to Andoni and Anastasia Bizos on November 15th 1927 in the village of Vasilitsi, in the south of Greece. His parents farmed olives, and George was the first of their four children who survived infancy. Andoni was mayor of the village and arranged road and water connections, but he was deposed in 1936 when the right-wing Metaxas dictatorship came to power through a coup de tat.

George attended primary school in Vasilitsi and Koroni, then started secondary school in Kalamata. George's schooling in Greece ended when Italy declared war on Greece in October 1940. In May 1941, at the age of 13, George, his father, and others from the village, helped seven New Zealand soldiers to escape from Nazi-occupied Greece. They attempted to sail to Crete, but were adrift for three days before being rescued by a British warship. They were taken to Alexandria, where his father took the decision to evacuate with other refugees to South Africa. The pro-Nazi Ossewa Brandwag were angry that Jan Smuts was bringing the "vuilgoed" (rubbish) of Europe to South Africa.

Unable to speak English or Afrikaans, George worked as a shop assistant in Johannesburg, until a teacher recognised him as the refugee mentioned in a newspaper, and insisted that George start at Malvern Junior High the next day. George later matriculated from Athlone Boys. From 1948 he studied for a BA LLB at Wits, where he became politically active and served on the SRC.

George married Arethe Daflos, a Johannesburg-born Fine Arts Graduate from a Greek family. They were married for over 60 years until she passed away in 2017. They set up home in Parktown North in the late 1950s and had three sons, Kimon, Damon, and Alexi, and seven grandchildren.

George's mother Anastasia visited Johannesburg in the mid 1960s. She dug up a stretch of lawn to establish a vegetable patch: George then became a devoted gardener, using the time for quiet thought. Many benefited from his vegetables, including clients in prison.

George joined the Johannesburg Bar in 1954, and as a personal friend of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, often acted as an advocate for their law firm. Early in his career he acted for Trevor Huddleston of Sophiatown, and defended small rural communities against the effects of apartheid laws, including in Zeerust after protests against the extension of Pass Laws to women.

At the Rivonia Trial he was a junior member of the team that defended Nelson Mandela and others. The accused were spared the death penalty: George is credited with advising Mandela to add the words "if needs be" before he said that he was prepared to die.

He defended many others who struggled against apartheid, including Mac Maharaj, Bram Fischer (who was a significant personal and professional influence in George's life), the accused in the NUSAS trial, Rob Adam, the accused in the Delmas Treason Trial, Albertina Sisulu and Barbara Hogan. He represented Winnie Madikizela-Mandela on more than 20 occasions. He defended the Namibians Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, as well as Morgan Tsvangirai when he was charged with high treason in Zimbabwe.

George represented the families at inquests into the deaths of people in detention, including for Looksmart Ngudle, Ahmed Timol, Steve Biko and Neil Aggett.

From the mid 1980s Nelson Mandela asked George to be his emissary for discussions with the exiled leadership of the ANC. George never joined the ANC, but in 1990 he became a member of the ANC's Legal and Constitutional Committee and an adviser at CODESA.

George joined the Legal Resources Centre in 1991. He helped draft legislation, particularly the Truth and Reconciliation Bill and human rights amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act. He led the Government legal team which ensured that that the Constitution was adopted by the Constitutional Court. He was appointed by President Mandela to the Judicial

Services Commission for 5 years in 1994, and an additional two terms by President Mbeki for 10 years ending in 2009. He was a lifelong campaigner against the use of the death penalty, and led the team that acted for the Government arguing that the death penalty was unconstitutional.

At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he was the leader of the team opposing applications for amnesty on behalf of the Biko, Hani, Goniwe, Calata, Mkonto, Mhlauli, Slovo and Schoon families.

George led the LRC's legal team for the families of those slain at Marikana: initiating the forensic work that exposed the massacre and placing evidence before the Farlam Inquiry. In 2018 the LRC inaugurated the George Bizos Human Rights Award, to recognise those protecting, upholding and advancing a culture of human rights in South Africa.

Beyond his legal career, George placed a high value on inclusive education and Hellenism. He chaired the SAHETI School board for many years and a scholarship fund has been established in his name.

George received several awards, including the Order for Meritorious Service from President Mandela, and was made Commander of the Order of the Phoenix by the President of Greece. He was granted Freedom of the Cities of Athens, London and Johannesburg, as well as several honorary doctorates and recognition by legal bodies in South Africa and internationally.

As a family we celebrate George's courage, dedication and unflinching commitment to justice, which was grounded in passion, wit and empathetic humanity. He lived with boundless energy, optimism and selflessness. We will remember him. Rest in Peace, Dad, Papou, Uncle George.