

COMMUNITY NEWS

Mandela Literacy Campaign Launched

Former South African Minister Mac Maharaj was on hand to celebrate at the launch of *Mandela: Authorized Portrait* with Hip-Hop Activist Raoul Juneja (a.k.a. DeeJay Ra) and supporters, on October 30th at the World's Biggest Bookstore boutique in Downtown Toronto.

Revered as the closest-living comrade to world leader Nelson Mandela and one of the century's most prominent freedom fighters of South Asian heritage, Maharaj reflected on a variety of emotional issues at the event, ranging from his historic twelve years of wrongful incarceration alongside Mandela, to his current editing of the most comprehensive portrait of



Mandela ever published with fellow Robben Island compatriot Ahmed Mohamed Kathrada.

A 'Mandela Literacy' initiative was also launched by Juneja as a spin-off to his 'Hip-Hop Literacy' program with the support of Maharaj last week, encouraging South African themed books to students such as "Biko" by Donald Woods. "Biko" was the basis for "Gandhi" director Lord Attenborough's "Cry Freedom" 1987 film, which garnered Denzel Washington's first Oscar nomination for his portrayal of assassinated civil rights leader Steve Biko.

Maharaj began campaigning against segregation of Africans and Indians in

South Africa as early as 1955 at the University of Natal while serving as the editor of the student newspaper. During his release from Robben Island in 1976, Maharaj smuggled Nelson Mandela's memoirs out of prison and was appointed to maintain the underground African National Congress (ANC) within South Africa. Maharaj's role as overall commander of Operation Vula in 1988 provided the still imprisoned Nelson Mandela a direct

communication channel to his exiled comrades such as ANC President Oliver Tambo in Zambia.

Raoul Juneja, known as DeeJay Ra, is founder of the 'Hip-Hop Literacy' high school and college program. He is currently campaigning for the birthdays of Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi to be officially recognized on Canadian calendars.

Photograph courtesy: Jag Gundu