



MEMORIES: A collage of pictures taken from the book *Comrades and Memsahibs* by Ameen Akhalwaya. A selection from the book will be read on National Press Freedom Day.

Media icon is honoured

Ameen Akhalwaya is remembered as a man who always held a light up to the truth

ON WEDNESDAY, October 19, 1977, the apartheid regime announced the banning of three newspapers – the *World*, *Weekend World*, and the *Voice* – the entire spectrum of Black Consciousness Movement organisations, and detained activists under section 10 of the Internal Security Act.

That day is commemorated in South Africa as Black Wednesday and is also marked as National Press Freedom Day.

Activist group Women in Action, in partnership with the Durban University of Technology Library, is hosting a critical discussion on the state of writing and journalism in the mainstream media of South Africa today, using the late journalist Ameen Akhalwaya's book, *Comrades and Memsahibs*, as a reference to spark a discourse.

Akhalwaya played a significant role

during that period.

The event, which takes place on October 19 at Mansfield I Hall from 6-8pm, aims to promote a critical discourse on the role of the mainstream media in South Africa today and to honour the bravery of veteran journalists.

A selection of Ameen Akhalwaya's writings will be read and a panel discussion will follow each reading. Themes under discussion include government control, journalism and past challenges, objectivity of the press and trials in the workplace, and the right to know.

Press ombudsman Joe Thlooe will be one of the speakers. Others on the panel are: Nalini Nobin from the *Witness*, Pritz Dullay (Right to Know campaign); Jean Prinsloo (gender activist), Khulekani Magubane and Sheetal Schneider (DUT School of Journalism).

"Ameen will always be remembered as part of that generation of writers who, during the struggle against apartheid, never hesitated to choose the side of democracy, peace and justice," the ANC said in a statement.

He was presented with the Extraordinary Award of the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Southern Africa in November. The association described him as a fearless fighter for equal rights and an inspiration to young journalists.

CNN bureau chief Mike Hanna described him as an honest, courageous colleague: "A man who always held up a light to the truth but never sacrificed the professional independence which was the ground on which he stood."

He studied medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin but his medical career was cut short by the death

of his father. After trying his hand in accountancy, he entered journalism as a freelance reporter with the *Rand Daily Mail* (RDM) in 1971.

Akhalwaya was appointed metropolitan editor of the newspaper in 1982. After the closure of the RDM and the *Sunday Express* in 1985, he founded *The Indicator*, a pioneer in alternative journalism.

He joined the SABC in 1993 as executive editor of current affairs and *Agenda*, and then Absa Bank as media manager.

In 1996 he was appointed media director of Cape Town's Olympic Bid Committee. Akhalwaya, who in 1978 was a founder-member of the Media Workers' Association of South Africa, was awarded the 1981 Nieman Fellowship to Harvard University in the United States. – 701198