Cornell faculty, staff, and students packed G10 Biotechnology Building on August 29, 2013 for a talk entitled "Liberating the Mind and Liberating the Heart: South African Experience in Dealing with Terrorism and Torture" by South African Constitutional Court Justice (1994-2009) and anti-apartheid activist Albie Sachs. The talk was given as part of the Einaudi Center's Foreign Policy Distinguished Speaker Series.

Einaudi Center Director and Vice Provost for International Affairs Fredrik Logevall's introduction of Sachs emphasized the importance of his recent appointment as an A.D. White Professor-at-Large, which would see him visiting the Ithaca area for 10 days, giving talks and lectures at multiple venues around campus and meeting with many faculty, staff, and students.

Bearing the scars of an assassination attempt, Sachs began his talk with the story of the day in which he woke up in a hospital after surviving a car bombing. "Everything suddenly went dark," said Sachs, knowing that something was happening yet unsure whether he was alive or dead. A nurse's voice through the darkness assured him that he was indeed alive, yet the struggles he would face as he recovered would be daunting.

Still, Sachs was resilient, realizing that although he had lost an arm and an eye, he had survived to see himself get stronger and could still one day witness his country grow into the free state he had been dreaming of for so long. After receiving a letter in the hospital from a comrade promising to "avenge him," Sachs questioned if this was what they were fighting for. "Is that the kind of country we want to create?"

Choosing to address the audience with stories rather than a lecture, Sachs went on to describe his time while being unlawfully detained for being branded a "terrorist" as a member of the African National Congress (ANC), the group committed to ending apartheid. He referred to his time in solitary confinement as the "deepest, darkest depression" anyone can experience. Alone in a cell for months at a time, Sachs described how he would be brutally kept awake through late hours of
the night, hoping and praying that his captors would not break him. Minutes in the cell felt like
days, and although he understood that his connection with the ANC is what led him to be
branded an enemy of the state, he was still released without a thorough explanation for his
torture and captivity, never once having the opportunity to present his case or defend himself.

Sachs' final story described his encounter with Henry, the man who planned the car bombing
which almost took his life. Continuing to push for the "soft vengeance" he preached throughout
his time with the ANC, Sachs did not push to have Henry arrested or punished for his crimes, yet
urged him to come forward to the Truth Commission, a body founded to uncover the many
hidden truths behind human rights violations that took place during apartheid. Though he stated
that "Henry is not my friend," Sachs knew that if he were to ever sit down next to Henry on a
bus, he'd ask him "How are you getting on?" That to him, the ability to sit next to a fellow South
African and not just a man who had attempted to take his life, was the soft vengeance he had
always been looking for.

The Foreign Policy Distinguished Speaker Series features prominent leaders in international
affairs who can address topical issues from a variety of perspectives. The Speaker Series is part
of the Foreign Policy Initiative at Cornell University led by the Einaudi Center to maximize the
intellectual impact of Cornell's outstanding resources in this area.