

5 December 2013

**Statement of H.E. John W. Ashe
President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,
on the passing of Nelson Mandela**

It is with great sadness that I learn of the passing today of an international peace icon and perhaps the greatest moral leader of our time, Mr. Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa. As the President of the General Assembly, I would like to pay tribute to President Mandela and to convey my sincere condolences to his family and to the Government and people of South Africa on the occasion of the loss of a great architect of the new South Africa and indeed the new Africa.

In 1994, Mr. Mandela became the first democratically elected President of South Africa, embracing his former oppressors and leading the country on a new path of healing. By so doing, President Mandela chose reconciliation over revenge, hope over despair. As he so eloquently said in his Inaugural Address: "Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another."

Let the following words he spoke serve as a reminder of his greatness and the legacy he leaves behind to a grateful nation and an admiring world: "We must become bigger than we have ever been: more courageous, greater in spirit, larger in outlook. We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations but to our fellow men within the human community."

We, the international community, mourn his death while celebrating his deeds. Madiba, as he was affectionately known to his beloved family and his people, personified true democratic leadership. As a global human family, we celebrate July 18, as Nelson Mandela International Day and today, we mourn the passing of the man in whose honour this day was named. This is indeed an immensely sad day for the world, yet his heroic spirit will forever remain with us all.