



**Statement**

**by**

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**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations**

**General Assembly**

**in the**

**61<sup>st</sup> Plenary Meeting  
of the General Assembly**

**on the**

**Death of Mr. Nelson Mandela**

**New York**

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*Please check against delivery*

Today, in this Assembly of Nations, we mourn the loss of Mr. Nelson Mandela – one of our world’s greatest global leaders – whose life and legacy transcends borders and will live on through the ages.

On your collective behalf, I would like to convey my sincere condolences to his family and to the people and Government of South Africa for the loss of the greatest architect and champion of the new South Africa, and indeed the new Africa.

Madiba, as he was affectionately known to his beloved family and his people, personified true democratic leadership, moral fortitude and heroic courage. He embodied the highest values of our United Nations, and by the example of his life and his actions demonstrated the difference one person can make in the face of adversity, oppression and prejudice, while maintaining a disposition of humility, humour and modesty that is so rare amongst people of his stature.

The world looks to the legacy of President Mandela because he chose forgiveness over revenge, and hope over despair. The anti-apartheid leader and Nobel laureate was a beloved figure around the world and a symbol of reconciliation in a country that was for generations the definition of racism. He became a prominent symbol of resistance and the face of the anti-apartheid movement that spread throughout South Africa and ultimately across the world. We in the international community join with countless millions across our planet in mourning his death, while at the same time celebrating his great deeds and triumphs.

On June 12, 1964, Mr. Mandela was on trial for plotting to overthrow the then apartheid government of South Africa by force. The world will always remember his closing statement, given in his own defense, when he said, and I quote:

"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in

harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die." [End quote]

The expressions of both grief and unbridled praise by millions around the world remind us of the magnitude of our loss, the height of his achievements and the place within each of us that is lit up by true greatness. The United Nations family will continue to honour the legacy of Mr. Mandela on July 18<sup>th</sup>, designated as Nelson Mandela International Day by this Assembly. Yet our best tribute to this illustrious son of Africa is to embrace his ideals, values and conviction. In doing so, we can emulate his contributions to peace in our world and ensure that the legacy of Madiba remains with us for all time.

I was very fortunate to have met the man during his lifetime: before he became President of South Africa, and after. On both occasions, I can only humbly say that the impact of meeting him was nothing short of awe-inspiring. To this very day, to the maximum extent possible, I have drawn personal inspiration in trying to ensure – in his words – that, in this imperfect life:

[quote] “What counts is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is the difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the lives we lead.”

Thank you.

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