



Remarks

by

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**Special General Assembly Plenary Meeting
on the Life and Memory of Nelson Mandela**

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Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to pay tribute to and acknowledge the legacy of a most unusual man – Nelson Mandela - a man who moved a nation, a continent and the world around him through his actions, his words and his thoughts. A man who lived 27 years a captor but never let the jail cell limit his fierce intellect, his passion for justice, rob him of his humanity, his dignity or his humour. Such a man will not be forgotten, not by us who gather in this room today to honor his life, and not by our children or our children's children. Nelson Mandela will live in our collective memories, and in our histories as a pathbreaker, a history maker and an outspoken advocate for all that is better in each of us.

This past week, the collective thoughts of the international community have been with the Mandela family, the people and Government of South Africa who are mourning the loss of Nelson Mandela –affectionately known as Madiba - and celebrating his glorious life. The tributes have been numerous and generous for this beloved leader whose life's work and example touched and inspired people in every part of the world.

Today, in this Assembly of Nations, we gather to add our voices to that chorus of tributes and to reaffirm global admiration for the exceptional qualities that Madiba exhibited during his lifetime, which are invaluable to the life and dignity of all peoples, and transcend the boundaries of race and ethnicity, language, culture, and geography.

We all admire the person who is able to forgive the seemingly unforgivable, whose courage overwhelms challenging and desolate circumstances, who finds hope amongst bleak and improbable odds, and who demonstrates humility, even when being honoured and exalted. More than that we admire a person who by sheer force of will and perseverance, who by pursuing the broader and inclusive positive over the limiting and

restrictive negative, became an instrument of change and peace and elevated the human condition and altered our collective human experience ever more.

Today we will hear many tributes, to a leader who used his life, including his time in prison, to hone the qualities he would ultimately need to navigate his country from a discriminatory and shameful past, to a new future based on equality and justice for all. Let us take a moment, in this our shared Assembly of Nations to reflect on what I believe to be one of the most historic speeches of our time-President Mandela's inauguration speech [and I quote]:

“We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom.

We know it well that none of us acting alone can achieve success.

We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world.

Let there be justice for all.

Let there be peace for all.

Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.”

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we honour him today, let's us not forget that in the winter of 1964, in the desolation of Robben Island, Madiba was confined to a cell where he would spend 18 years, with a bucket for a toilet and forced to do hard labour in a quarry. He was allowed just one visitor a year for 30 minutes, and could write and receive just one letter every six months. And yet, that prisoner in that jail cell on that desolate island became a lasting symbol of his country's struggle against the cruel and unjust system of apartheid; that prisoner when released by his captors became a global leader and beacon of hope in the larger struggle

against injustice, intolerance, cruelty and vengeance. This struggle goes on – in both the most profound global challenges, as well as in the conflicts of daily life felt by millions of poor and marginalized peoples and communities in the world today.

So today in this our United Nations, let us honour Nelson Mandela by letting his legacy live on in our continuing struggle against poverty, injustice and the destruction of the human person and human spirit, and by setting an example for our children and our children's children that allows them to see and emulate the best virtues which reside within members of the human family.

Let us remember that we too must work together to reduce hunger, and injustice, to build lasting peace and sustainable development, to stop genocide and combat hatred. Let us remember that we can also be like him – because we too can *choose* the better way, choose to work toward those causes that are greater and better than our narrow interests, and in so doing, find and nurture the best in ourselves and others.

Thank you.
