



**Remarks**

**by**

**H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe**

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

**General Assembly**

**Informal meeting of the plenary of the General Assembly on  
Nelson Mandela International Day**

**New York**

**18 July 2014**

*Please check against delivery*

Excellencies,  
Hon. Baleka Mbete,  
Secretary General,  
Former Mayor Dinkins,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the past five years, we have come together to celebrate the life and spirit of a unique individual who touched the entire world – Nelson Mandela – the Madiba. This year, for the first time, we celebrate his birthday without him. But while our hearts hang heavy with loss, we have his indelible memory and his important legacy to carry forward.

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,

As we honour this great man's legacy, permit me to recall something he said on the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I quote: "The world remains beset by so much human suffering, poverty and deprivation. It is in your hands to make of our world a better one for all, especially the poor, vulnerable and marginalised". [end quote]

On this special day – his day – I can think of no more poignant call to action than: "It is now in our hands".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Madiba let us know how he wanted to be remembered and how he wanted us to commemorate this day: with inspired action that would bring light, positivity, and hope to the world.

On Nelson Mandela International Day, we recall that Madiba gave 67 years of his life to public service. Our General Assembly Resolution 64/13 recognized his service to humanity in the fields of [quote] "conflict resolution, race relations, promotion and protection of human rights, reconciliation, gender equality and the rights of children

and other vulnerable groups, as well as the upliftment of poor and underdeveloped communities.” [end quote]

Our United Nations joins a call by the Mandela Foundation to honour Madiba by giving 67 minutes of our day in service to humanity: a small gesture in a world that desperately needs acts of kindness and goodwill.

Madiba was a fervent defender of justice, a voice of conscience and the embodiment of reconciliation. Reading his words and honouring his memory stand in stark contrast to the bitterness, struggle, conflict and despair that all too often fill our news media headlines. We may not be able to change the sorrows or the tragedies of the world singlehandedly, but indeed, it is in our hands to make a difference with our individual 67 minutes.

Since I assumed the Office of President of the General Assembly, I have spoken many times about the forthcoming post 2015 development agenda. And on many occasions, I have reiterated how it must involve each and every one of us. In order to be successful, it must engage our hearts and minds, and create a vision of justice, prosperity and opportunity for all the peoples of the world, while honouring our planet.

Our planet and our people face many challenges. New tragedies and old political conflicts, human deprivation and intolerance confront us every day. But we cannot give in to despair and despondency, because each inspired action of service, kindness or generosity will bring us closer to the realization that if we give our all we can strive for a better tomorrow.

This is what Madiba wanted from us. This is what he asked for when he said, [quote] "It is time for new hands to lift the burdens. It is in your hands now." [end quote].

Today, I commend our Secretary General and UN staff for the work they will do taking care of newly planted trees on the streets of Midtown Manhattan and East Harlem, and I hope many others will likewise give some of their time and energy to improving this planet we share.

I am also very pleased that during my Presidency, the General Assembly has decided to grant the “United Nations Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize” to an individual who embodies the spirit of Mandela. It provides an opportunity to recognize a man or woman who has turned his or her individual 67 minutes into many years of dedicated work or into a lifetime commitment towards making that difference for the greater good. I look forward to the General Assembly determining the criteria and procedures of this prize in a few short months from now.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this first year without Madiba, each and every one of us gathered here knows that he will be remembered and revered for many generations to come. His impact on the world was so profound and meaningful, that his name will be spoken by our children and our children’s children.

As we contemplate what each one of us can do today to honour his memory, let us remember that despite a life time of deprivation and political imprisonment, Madiba never let his indomitable spirit waver and gave the world the very best of himself for as long as he could. It is a reminder that we each have so much to offer regardless of circumstance, gender, race and creed. May we continue to be inspired by his many acts of courage, determination and justice, and may we use his example to find what is best in ourselves and others around us.

**THE FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS.**

Thank you.

\*\*\*