

18 July 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of the World Celebration of Mandela Day**

I warmly welcome the global campaign to recognize the birthday of Nelson Mandela, 18 July, as an annual opportunity to celebrate this great man and the values and principles that he has come personify over the past seven decades.

Our troubled and conflicted world is in great need of leaders like Nelson Mandela. Since his early days as an anti-Apartheid activist to his recent years as a peacemaker and conscience of our times, Nelson Mandela has demonstrated the power of conviction and solidarity. He stands as an example of what true leadership should be and presents a powerful antidote to the moral bankruptcy that has become so evident in so many of our societies.

As a priest, I consider Nelson Mandela one of the saints of our time, a holy man who has demonstrated the courage of his convictions, suffering years of imprisonment in his fearless resistance to the immorality of the racist doctrine of Apartheid that ruled his native South Africa for half a century. When I think of the triumphs of Mandela, I think of another world leader and symbol of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, who first applied his ideas of civil disobedience in South Africa.

As a Sandinista, I admire Nelson Mandela for his unwavering solidarity to liberation movements around the world, including with the revolution against the injustices of dictatorship and neo-colonial rule that my country, Nicaragua, has fought in the spirit of its resistance leader, Augusto C. Sandino, in the 1930s.

As president of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, I acknowledge the enormous inspiration that Mandela provided to the world community to repudiate, isolate and ultimately dismantle the Apartheid state. Guided by the wisdom and determination of this man, we have witnessed the birth of the multi-racial democracy that is South African today, largely through non-violent means. The United Nations is proud to have accompanied him in his journey.

I hope that Mandela Day will eventually be celebrated as a United Nations international day to serve as an inspiration, in particular to our young people, and as invitation to join forces in the ever-more complex and urgent campaigns against poverty, racism, ignorance and violence. I believe our world is in need of new paradigms and that Nelson Mandela is a living example of how we can build one. Let us draw upon the enormous reservoirs of courage and good will that sustained Nelson Mandela through decades, and commit ourselves to the campaign for human rights, justice and reconciliation in our communities, in our countries and throughout the world.