

# Farewell Madiba: But Freedom never Dies...

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*Madiba is not among us anymore. This is something which we should believe, or somehow convince ourselves to believe. However, the “grandpa”, who was a source of inspiration for the entire world throughout his fruitful life, can still be seen as an icon of freedom, struggle for peace and dignity and disobedience to oppression and tyranny.*

The South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs has confirmed that dignitaries and leaders from more than 90 countries have diverged on South Africa to attend the memorial service of the late anti-apartheid South African leader Nelson Mandela who passed away on Thursday, December 5, after struggling with respiratory infection for many years.

Nelson Mandela is not simply honored because he was the first democratically-elected president of South Africa, nor because he spent nearly three decades behind the bars. He is honored because he spent his brilliant yet painful life contributing new virtues to the humanity and turning the troubled world of his time a better place to live.

Nelson Mandela lived an adventurous and unconventional life. At Crown Mines in Johannesburg, he worked for a while as a night watchman, where he first felt the essence of South African capitalism. At the end of his first year as an undergraduate student in the University of Fort Hare, Mandela, whose middle name “Rolihlahla” means troublemaker in the local language, got involved in a Students’ Representative Council boycott against the quality of food being offered to the students.

He was expelled from the university and ended up without receiving a degree. His exciting life proved that he was a real troublemaker for those who wanted to further their desires illegitimately and through oppressing and exploiting others. This was later echoed in his efforts to put an end to the era of apartheid in South Africa and bringing about peace and democracy to his people.

Madiba, or the grandfather, which is the nickname given to the South African hero by his fellow citizens, experienced and sensed the depth of racial discrimination and injustice against him and the other African blacks throughout his whole life. This feeling of humiliation, despite being agonizing, made him aware of the difficulties the blacks were undergoing. For instance, he was constantly disdained and scorned at when he entered the University of the Witwatersrand. It’s said that he was the only black student of the university. At that time, under the 1959 Extension of University Education Act, it was considered a criminal offence for a non-white student to register at a formerly open university without the written permission of the Minister of Internal Affairs. Thanks to the efforts made by the very man who was at the time contemptuously ridiculed in a university where the prevailing majority of students were white, today only 27% of the students of the

University of Witwatersrand are white and a 53% majority of them are black. Nowadays, all the public institutions and educational centers in South Africa, including the universities, consider it as vital to attempt to remove the contamination of the apartheid years from the face of the society and maintain racial equality as a legacy of the anti-apartheid movement.

Mandela continued his efforts to claim the rights of the oppressed blacks of South Africa since he entered the university. In 1944, he married Evelyn Mase who was herself an activist associated with the African National Congress. Later on, he was appointed as the secretary and a member of executive committee of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL).

1948 was a very dark and distressing year for South Africa. In a fraudulent election in which only the whites were allowed to vote, the Herenigde Nasionale Party under the leadership of Daniel François Malan came to power and introduced a set of laws and codes to institutionalize racial segregation and apartheid laws in the country, despite the fact that such rules were practically in place.

Despite the fact that Mandela was once opposed to those communist Indians who were similarly fighting the apartheid regime because he believed their ideals were “un-African,” he later became impressed with the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin and reconciled with the communists in his country.

The “Black Pimpernel” was arrested at least four times following his graduation from the university, each time sentenced to a few months in prison and then released once the court revoked its verdict. However, when he was detained on August 5, 1962, he remained behind the bars until 1990 once F. W. de Klerk finally decided to release him. These 27 years passed for Mandela with enormous difficulty and pain; however, he was not silent and inactive in this period. In his famous speech to the Rivonia Trial on April 20, 1964, he audaciously stated that he is ready to die for his people.

In his speech, Mandela pointed at the fact that he was after a country in which opportunities and facilities are equally divided between the whites and the blacks: “during my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this 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.”

Following his freedom, Nelson Mandela embarked on a tour of African countries and then traveled to the Vatican City, Sweden, France, Britain, the United States, Cuba, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia and Japan to ask the world leaders to intensify the economic sanctions against the apartheid regime and contribute to the enfeeblement of the government.

Along with intensive lobbying across the world, Mandela started a set of negotiations with F. W. de Klerk that failed several times without bearing any fruits; however, after two bloody massacres in Boipatong and Bisho in which several supporters of the African National Congress were killed by the government forces, both sides agreed to continue the talks. In 1993, Mandela and de Klerk reached a final agreement on establishing a new government with a new political system. The same year, both of them were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, although everyone could distinguish the difference between the value of the prize awarded to Mandela and the one given to de Klerk.

In the 1994 South African general election that followed the agreement between Mandela and the government, Madiba's ANC party won a landslide victory against de Klerk's National Party, getting more than 12.2 million popular votes against 3.9 million votes for the NP. This was how Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first black and post-apartheid president.

Mandela's life is full of stories for us to at least try to emulate someone who knew what he was fighting and battling for, and why his ultimate objectives were important. He was committed and faithful to his goals and the people for whom he strived. His moral values and commitment to ethical behavior is also something which we need to carefully take note of.

The fact that Nelson Mandela was so inspirational and magnanimous that he even impressed and befriended his warder cannot be overlooked. Christo Brand was Mandela's warder for four years in the Robben Island prison and then in the Pollsmoor Prison. Mandela spent 18 years in the Robben Island prison from 1964 to 1982 and Brand was his custodian since 1978 when Nelson Mandela was 60 years old. Christo Brand was so influenced by Mandela that he used to secretly bring Madiba's favorite bread, foodstuff and shampoo to his ward without the permission of the prison authorities. He even once furtively took Mandela's granddaughter to the jail where he was able to hug her for a few minutes.

The demise of Nelson Mandela, an icon of freedom and dignity, left Brand in sorrow, along with millions of people across the world who grieved his departure from the mundane world.

"When I got the message when he passed away, it was very sad for me," Brand told The Associated Press. "But I think he was successful and he did what he wanted to do. I wanted him to go in peace and I am thinking of the family today, what they go through."

The world's current and former leaders, with different political mindsets and belongings, expressed their sadness and grief at the loss of Mandela. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate himself and an anti-apartheid leader wrote an extensive article for AllAfrica.com, retelling his memories for the lost South African leader. "The world is a better place for Nelson Mandela. He showed in his own character, and inspired in others, many of God's attributes: goodness, compassion, a desire for justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. He was not only an amazing gift to humankind, he made South Africans and Africans feel good about being who we are. He made us walk tall. God be praised," he wrote.

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon also mourned death of Nelson Mandela: "South Africa has lost a hero, they have lost a father. The world has lost a beloved friend and mentor. Nelson Mandela was more than one of the greatest leaders of our time; he was one of the greatest teachers. And he taught by example," he said.

Mandela has passed away and is no longer with us to give warmth and hope to our turbulent and tumultuous world. However, he has left a legacy which cannot be ever forgotten. He demonstrated that steadfastness and perseverance will always bear fruit, and that insistence on one's sublime goals will never end in futility.

Nelson Mandela, since his early years as a young student, had set objectives which he came to realize some four decades later. These objectives were so transcendent and prominent that he never retreated or moved away from them. It seems that fatigue and weakness had no meaning in his life dictionary. He was such a great personality that world leaders from more than 90 countries participated in his memorial service. He was always in

good terms with the independent leaders of the world, traveled to Iran two times during his tenure as the South African President and praised the great Islamic Revolution of the Iranian people.

It seems that the only enemies of Nelson Mandela are the bullying oppressors, tyrants and occupiers who never come to terms with such concepts as peace, friendship and equality. Although these evil forces are in minority, they possess an enormous power and such inspirational, resistant and invincible figures as Nelson Mandela pose a constant and unwavering threat to their existence.

Mandela has gone from the earthly world, but his values will always prevail and his path will be followed by all those who enshrine freedom, liberty and the right to self-determination. Farewell "Madiba Tata"; the freedom for which you fought in your whole life will never die.

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