





Nelson Mandela:

An Icon of Tolerance and Peace

By Sadab Kitatta Kaaya

When xenophobic violence broke out in South Africa last September, memories of the country's former leader, Nelson Madiba Mandela were elicited with many wondering whether if he (Mandela) was still living, he would like what was going on.

Mandela would definitely not approve of such attacks in the post-apartheid South Africa for he was a man who is known as one who despite terrible provocation during the days of apartheid never answered racism with racism.

He inspired many that in 2011, the UN Human Rights Council organized the Mandela panel discussion on the promotion and protection of human rights through tolerance and reconciliation during which the then UN Deputy



High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kang Kyung-wha described Mandela as a powerful inspiration that reminds everyone to make a difference.

The Council particularly took note of Mandela's example in promoting and protecting human rights without distinction as to race, color or national or ethnic origin.

"There is no better example of the transformative power of tolerance and reconciliation than Nelson Mandela and his inspiring work in overthrowing the apartheid government in South Africa. Nelson Mandela faced one of the greatest evils of our time," Amira Fouad who led the US delegation to the panel discussion.

"Nelson Mandela taught us that the humanity all of us share can help us transcend the sins some of us commit. His life reminds us that justice and tolerance can overcome even the greatest cruelty," she added.

For 27 years, Mandela was a prisoner at Robben Island following his April 1964 conviction on charges of sabotage in what came to be known as the Rivonia trial at Pretoria's Palace of Justice.

Mandela and 10 others faced a death penalty for the charges but the trial judge gave them a life sentence after Mandela had made the now famous "speech from

the dock" that lasted for three hours.

"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," Mandela is quoted to have told the trial judge.

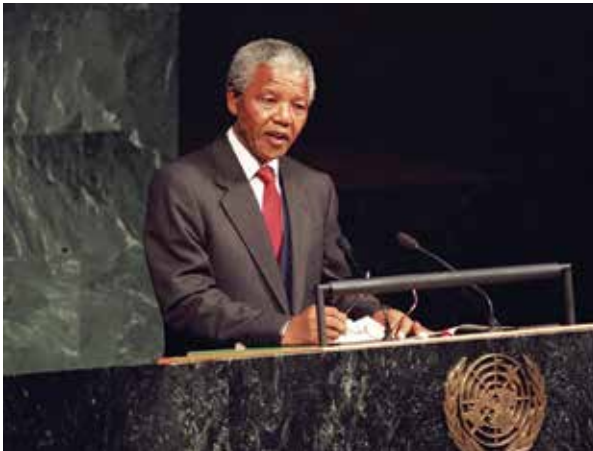
His 27-year prison term was split between Robben Island, Pollsmoor maximum security prison and Victor Verster prison near Cape Town until February 11, 1990 when he walked to his freedom.

In the crowd that gathered outside Victor Verster prison as Mandela was unconditionally released was Roger Thurow, then a correspondent for The Wall Street Journal based in South Africa.

In an article he wrote for the Washington based Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting which was published in December 2013 following Mandela's death, Thurow recalled the moment as Mandela walked out prison, wondering – like many in the crowd, what he would say after 27 years in prison.

"Though more than one-third of his life had been taken away from him, he spoke not of revenge but of reconciliation. South Africa needed to come together,

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not remain apart,” Thurow wrote.

Retribution was not part of his agenda as he instead preached reconciliation, emphasizing that even in the face of an intolerant minority white government, they needed to be tolerant.

“The life of Mandela, even while he was in prison, provided a good example in tolerance and reconciliation to peoples around the world,” opined Amer Araim, a former staff of the United Nations Center against Apartheid, in a December 2013 article published by East Bay Times, a California, USA based newspaper.

“Notwithstanding his many years in prison and the brutality of the apartheid regime against black South Africans, Mandela was instrumental in preventing any revengeful or retaliatory actions against the white minority in South Africa,” Araim wrote.

Because of his efforts for the peaceful termination apartheid in South Africa, Mandela was jointly awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1993 that he shared with the then South African president Frederik Willem de Klerk, the man whom he later replaced in 1994 as the first popularly elected black president.

As president, Mandela established a truth and reconciliation commission that helped to renounce past practices and to integrate society. He emphasized forgiveness and reconciliation telling the black South Africans that courageous people do not fear forgiving for the sake of peace.

“No one is born hating another person for the color of their skin, religion or background, hatred and intolerance have to be learned. Even in the grimmest times, I have seen glimmers of humanity which reassured me that man’s goodness is a flame that can never be extinguished,” Mandela said in an April 30, 2006 interview broadcast by CBS, an American TV network to audiences in 82 countries.

Mandela died on December 5, 2013 at his home at Houghton, Johannesburg, South Africa after suffering from a prolonged respiratory infection.

QUOTES ON TOLERANCE



“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

**Nelson Mandela, Former
President of South Africa**



“If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships - the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace.”

**Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd U.S.
President**



“The only way to make sure people you agree with can speak is to support the rights of people you don’t agree with.”

**Eleanor Holmes Norton,
American Politician.**



“In the practice of tolerance, one’s enemy is the best teacher.”

Dalai Lama XIV