

Nelson Mandela Memorial Service

FNB Stadium, 10 December 2013

President Jacob Zuma's Speech in Honour of Nelson Mandela

Mama Graca Machel, Mama Winnie Madikizela Mandela and the entire Mandela family and the abaThembu clan,

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies Former Heads of State and Government,

Deputy Presidents and representatives of governments,

Heads of international organisations in all regions of the world,

The leadership of the ANC and Alliance partners,

Leaders of fraternal political organisations in Africa and abroad,

Activists of the former anti-apartheid Movement,

Eminent persons, friends of South Africa from all over the world,

Fellow South Africans,

Sanibonani!

Good day!

Molweni!

Dumelang!

South Africans sing a popular freedom song about former President Nelson Mandela.

We sing that he is one of a kind, that there is no one quite like him. Nelson Mandela, Nelson Mandela akekho ofana naye.

The song is one of the most accurate descriptions of this global icon who is the founding President of a free and democratic South Africa and also the former President of the oldest liberation movement in the continent, the ANC.

His passing has marked an unprecedented outpouring of grief across the world. Yet, it is grief, tinged with admiration and celebration.

Everyone has had a Mandela moment, when this world icon has touched their lives. Let me begin therefore, by thanking all the Heads of State and Government and international delegations present here today.

We also extend our deepest gratitude for the messages of condolence that we continue to receive.

The Mandela family, the South African people and the African continent as a whole, feel stronger today, because we are being comforted by millions throughout the world.

Dear South Africans,

That we are Madiba's compatriots and have lived during his time, is a cause for a great celebration and enormous pride.

Never before has our country celebrated a life as we are doing with that of Madiba. We do not call Madiba the father of our rainbow nation merely for political correctness and relevance.

We do so because he laid a firm foundation for the South Africa of our dreams - one that is united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous.

We do so because Madiba was a courageous leader.

Courageous leaders are able to abandon their narrow concerns for bigger and all-embracing dreams, even if those dreams come at a huge price.

Madiba embodied this trait. He was a fearless freedom fighter who refused to allow the brutality of the apartheid state to stand in the way of the struggle for the liberation of his people.

Being a lawyer, he understood the possible consequences of his actions. But he also knew that no unjust system could last forever.

He said at an ANC Youth League conference in 1951;

"True, the struggle will be a bitter one. Leaders will be deported, imprisoned, and even shot.

"The government will terrorise the people and their leaders in an effort to halt the forward march; ordinary forms of organisation will be rendered impossible. But the spirit of the people cannot be crushed...until full victory is won".

The struggle became Madiba's life.

He was at the forefront of the radical change in the ANC in the 1940s, advancing the long walk to freedom.

He became a Volunteer in Chief during the Defiance Campaign in the early 1950s and became the first Commander in Chief of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe, in the early 1960s.

He paid dearly for his beliefs and actions through imprisonment.

He stated in 1962;

"I was made, by the law, a criminal, not because of what I had done, but because of what I stood for, because of what I thought, because of my conscience."

Arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment during the Rivonia Trial later in 1964, he never lost his fighting spirit.

For 27 years, the South African people spoke about him in hushed tones, out of fear. In fact, if the apartheid government had its way, they would have been banned even from thinking about Madiba.

But the powerful name of Nelson Mandela lived on.

He continued to inspire our people every single day, from inside prison walls.

He demonstrated unique leadership in starting negotiations with the enemy whilst in prison. He also negotiated for the release of his fellow political prisoners first before his own release.

His release from Victor Verster prison on the 11th of February 1990 was one of the most remarkable and moving moments in world history.

The world came to a standstill watching this tall imposing figure walking out into a world he had left behind 27 years before.

The emotions and feelings we felt on that day are difficult to express in human language.

A downtrodden people who had been dehumanised and made to feel like pariahs in the land of their birth, suddenly saw signs that freedom would be attained in their lifetime.

South Africa needed a leader like Madiba to help us through a difficult transition from apartheid to a free democratic society.

In the bumpy road to our historic first free and fair elections, there are many times that he brought our nation back from the brink of catastrophe.

The massacre at Boipatong in 1992 and the killing of the popular leader of our people, Chris Hani in 1993, are some of the occasions when our country faltered in its long walk to freedom, when we stared into the heart of darkness.

It is at these times that Madiba restored a sense of calm and purpose and brought us back on the road to freedom.

South Africa's first democratic elections were largely peaceful because of this leadership that he displayed.

Indeed, there is no one like Madiba. He was one of a kind.

Today, on International Human Rights Day, we celebrate Madiba the man of peace.

Today is the 20th anniversary of his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, on the 10th of December 1993.

This freedom fighter had always stated that the ANC had resorted to arms because of the intransigence of the apartheid regime which responded with violence, bannings and detentions to simple demands for equal citizenship, human rights and justice.

To him, for South Africa to attain peace, the armed struggle was inevitable, but it was a means to an end but not an end in itself.

Madiba's love for peace was also evident in the work he did in the continent. The people of Burundi enjoy peace and democracy today because of the seeds of peace planted by Madiba.

Following the historic national elections on 27 April 1994, an unprecedented number of Heads of State and Government and eminent persons from around the world descended upon our shores for Madiba's inauguration as the first president of a free and democratic South Africa.

Today, the whole world is standing still again, to pay tribute to this greatest son of South Africa and Africa.

Fellow mourners,

There is no one like Madiba, he was one of a kind.

The world speaks fondly of Madiba's promotion of unity, reconciliation and non-racialism during his Presidency.

He had declared as follows during trial in 1964;

"The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racialism. When it triumphs it will not change that policy".

Thus his promotion of non-racialism and reconciliation during his tenure as President of the Republic was not surprising.

Compatriots and friends

Speaking at the adoption of a new Constitution of the Republic adopted in 1996, Madiba outlined the vision of the new society.

He said;

"Let us give practical recognition to the injustices of the past, by building a future based on equality and social justice.

"Let us nurture our national unity by recognizing, with respect and joy, the languages, cultures and religions of South Africa in all their diversity.

"Let tolerance for one another's views create the peaceful conditions which give space for the best in all of us to find expression and to flourish. Above all, let us work together in striving to banish homelessness, illiteracy, hunger and disease."

With the magnitude of challenges facing the young South Africa in mind, Madiba set about uniting the nation.

He carefully managed the anger and frustrations of both the oppressors and the oppressed, and reminded us of our common humanity that transcended racial boundaries.

He also managed both the fears of the minority and the high expectations and impatience of the majority.

He told us that the promises of democracy would not be met overnight and that the fears of the few would not be allowed to derail the newly won freedom.

We all agreed with him, as Madiba never hesitated to speak his mind when it was necessary to do so, regardless of how uncomfortable the words may be to recipients! Many leaders, some of whom are present here today, have experienced his sharp tongue.

Realising the power of sport to conquer prejudice, former President Mandela embraced South Africa's 1995 Rugby World Cup ambitions, donning the Springbok jersey at a time when it was much-maligned by the majority of the population. This would be a hallmark of his Presidency.

Our sports teams yearned for the Madiba Magic that his visit would bring, each time they faced formidable opponents.

Beyond promoting reconciliation, Madiba also laid a firm foundation for transformation as well as reconstruction and development.

He knew that reconciliation without transformation and reconstruction, would be meaningless.

Under his leadership, the new democratically elected government focused on addressing historical injustices and creating new institutions to facilitate the building of a democratic society based on the principles of non-racialism and non-sexism. Close to 800 racist apartheid laws were removed from the statute books in the first 10 years of democracy.

The dismantling of the legal framework of apartheid and transformation of many state institutions led to the visible improvement of the socio-economic conditions of millions of people.

Thus, Madiba laid a foundation for a better life for all, which was the rallying cry of his Presidency.

Madiba also laid the foundation for our country's now successful fight against one of the greatest scourges of our time, that of HIV and AIDS, while still in office and during his retirement.

The global 4 666 4 campaign gave birth to Mandela Day, a global call to action, mobilising people to spend at least 67 minutes helping those in need.

In November 2009, the United Nations General Assembly declared the 18th of July as "Nelson Mandela International Day".

Each year on the 18th of July, the world comes together to celebrate Mandela Day, recognising Madiba's selfless sacrifice in betterment of others.

Indeed, Madiba was one of a kind.

Compatriots and friends,

While saying Madiba was one of a kind, we also remember that he believed in collective leadership and that he never wanted to be viewed as a messiah or a saint. He emphasised that all his achievements were derived from working with the ANC collective, among whom in his own words, were men and women who were more capable than he was.

Thus, the South Africa that you see today, is a reflection of Madiba and many others like him, who sacrificed their lives for a free nation.

We thus remain truly grateful to his peers, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Reginald Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Dorothy Nyembe, Florence Mophosho and countless others who left indelible marks in the history of our struggle.

Compatriots and friends,

Today Madiba is no more.

He leaves behind a nation that loves him dearly.

He leaves a continent that is truly proud to call him an African.

He leaves the people of the world who embraced him as their beloved icon.

Most importantly, he leaves behind a deeply entrenched legacy of freedom, human rights and democracy in our country.

In his honour we commit ourselves to continue building a nation based on the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom.

United in our diversity, we will continue working to build a nation free of poverty, hunger, homelessness and inequality.

As the African continent led by the African Union, we will continue working to fulfil his desire for a better Africa and a more just, peaceful and equitable world.

Tomorrow, our people will accompany Madiba on his last journey to the seat of government, the Union Buildings in Pretoria, where his body will lie in state for three days.

I have the honour today, to announce, that the Union Buildings Amphitheatre, where Madiba was inaugurated as President in 1994, and where his body will lie in state, will, with effect from today, be called the Nelson Mandela Amphitheatre.

This is a fitting tribute to a man who transformed the Union Buildings from a symbol of racism and repression to one of peace, unity, democracy and progress.

Compatriots, comrades and friends,

We extend yet again, our deepest condolences to Mama Graca Machel, Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and the entire extended family.

Madiba has run a good race. He declared in his own words in 1994;

He said;

"Death is something inevitable.

"When a man has done what he considers to be his duty to his people and his country, he can rest in peace.

"I believe I have made that effort and that is, therefore, why I will sleep for eternity."

I thank you.