

## NELSON MANDELA ON THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA

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At Nelson Mandela University

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In 2009, the UN declared July 18, Nelson Mandela's birthday, as Nelson Mandela International Day. To celebrate the day, the UN asked individuals around the world to spend 67 minutes making a difference in their communities. In this way, the UN hoped to honour the 67 years Mandela devoted to public service as a human rights lawyer, a prisoner of conscience, an international peacemaker and the first democratically elected president of a free South Africa.

In April 2001, shortly after the end of his presidency, Nelson Mandela said:

*"The Constitution of South Africa speaks of both the past and the future.*

*[It] permits us to build a nation based on the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom, through constitutionalism and the rule of law. [It] describes the mechanisms and institutions which we have created to ensure that we achieve this. There are no shortcuts on the road to freedom. The constitution describes the path which we must and shall follow.*

*[It] is a living document. Our understanding of its requirements will and must adapt over time. But the fundamental principles are and must be unchanging. Full understanding of how and why those principles were adopted will help us to ensure that we remain true to the solemn undertakings which we have made to each other and to those who will follow us."*

Future generations should be reminded that Nelson Mandela has correctly been described as the FATHER OF THE NATION. Younger people should have regard to his long contribution to the struggle.

He stood up as student of Fort Hare University and the University of the Witwatersrand; as an attorney, as a youth league politician and amongst the early list of black attorneys who did not accept unequal treatment, particularly after the end of the Second World War and even more the apartheid regime after 1948.

Walter Sisulu helped Nelson Mandela to find a job as an attorney's clerk in Johannesburg, join the African National Congress and register at Wits University as a law student. The newly elected Nationalist Party did not take kindly to black students sitting in the same classrooms as white students. A member of the nationalist party asked Prime Minister Malan when the doors to Wits would be closed to black students. The Students Representative Council protested. Prime Minister Malan said that "leftists" were behind it and that steps would be taken to put an end to it.

Nelson wanted to get an LLB degree and join the Johannesburg Bar. He failed his final year and was told by the Dean that the Bar was not for blacks and was forced to change to a diploma which would enable him to become an attorney. He and Oliver Tambo entered into partnership.

In the early 1950s Nelson took part in the Freedom Campaign and together with others was charged and convicted. An application was made to strike him from the roll of attorneys. He was defended by senior members of the Bar and was acquitted because "*his contravention of the law was not a moral transgression*".

The Mandela and Tambo partnership flourished, but magistrates made it difficult for Nelson, Oliver and their clerks to appear before them. Some of us at the Bar had to review their decisions.

In 1965 Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, the first black advocate Duma Nokwe and 162 other members of the struggle were arrested on a charge of treason. The number of the accused diminished to 30 among whom were Nelson and Duma. All of them were discharged in the early sixties.

The Sharpville massacre occurred in March 1960. The ANC and other political organisations were banned. Oliver Tambo fled to the United Kingdom. Nelson Mandela went underground and later visited numerous African countries and the United Kingdom. He returned, he was arrested and sentenced to five year imprisonment on Robben Island.

In June 1963 the leaders of Umkhonto we Sizwe were arrested at Rivonia. They were brought to Court more than three months later. Nelson was brought to join them at Pretoria prison. It was his ending place before he had left the country. The Apartheid government and its supporters were delighted. They predicted that the accused would be sentenced to death and the Apartheid Government would reign forever. The majority of the people of South Africa thought otherwise and had the support of world on their side.

In 1985, at a UDF rally to celebrate Archbishop Desmond Tutu receiving the Nobel Prize, Nelson Mandela's daughter, Zinzi, read out a statement on Nelson's behalf. In it he says:

*"I am a member of the African National Congress. I have always been a member of the African National Congress and I will remain a member of the African National Congress until the day I die. ...*

*I cherish my own freedom dearly, but I care even more for your freedom. Too many have died since I went to prison. Too many have suffered for the love of freedom. I owe it to their widows, to their orphans, to their mothers and to their fathers who have grieved and wept for them. Not only I have suffered during these long, lonely, wasted years. I am not less life-loving than you are.*

*But I cannot sell my birthright, nor am I prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free.*

...

*Your freedom and mine cannot be separated”.*

At a rally to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2008, Nelson made the following call to the members of the ANC. It is more relevant now than ever:

*“Celebrate and reaffirm the principle of collective leadership and inclusiveness. Let no individual, section, faction or group ever regard itself as greater than the organisation and the common good of all our people.*

*Celebrate the promotion of unity – within the organisation, amongst our allies, in the nation at large and amongst all our people. Our nation comes from a history of deep division and strife; let us never through our deeds or words take our people back down that road.*

*Celebrate our tradition of open debate, criticism, discussion and respect for democracy. We fought hard and sacrificed much for this democracy. Protect, defend, consolidate and advance democracy – within the organisation and in national life. Let us give the lead in demonstrating our respect for the institutions of our democracy - both in our actions and words.*

*Celebrate and reaffirm our fundamental commitment to creating a better life for all, particularly the poor and marginalised. Poverty and deprivation in our midst demean all of us. Let us mobilise in one great co-operative national effort the enormous energy of our society in order to overcome and eliminate poverty. We came*

*together as a nation to end the scourge of apartheid. Today we are challenged to end poverty and all its attendant suffering.*

*Celebrate the nobility of our ideals of creating a non-racial and non-sexist society. Let us redouble our efforts to fully realise the ideal of a democratic state and society that secures to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief. Let us live that non-racialism and non-sexism in our every day, deed and word.*

*You are the inheritors of a great organisation, one that has led for almost a century. It is now in your hands to uphold the best and the noblest of that history.*

*Now – as much as ever in our history – we require disciplined leaders and members with respect for their organisation, who care equally for all South Africans and for all people who live within our borders. Let there be peace and friendship.”*

Nelson’s message to you, the youth, was this (speaking at a children’s party with the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund):

*“To the youth of today, I also have a wish to make: Be the script writers of your destiny and feature yourselves as the stars that showed the way towards a brighter future.”*

We are expected to be faithful to our constitution, which has been well-regarded throughout the world.

*“We, the people of South Africa,*

*Recognise the injustices of our past;*

*Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;*

*Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and*

*Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

*We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to –*

*Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;*

*Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;*

*Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and*

*Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.*

*May God protect our people.*

*Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.*

*God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa.*

*Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika."*

*Let us Respond to the*

*FATHER OF THE Nation*

*George Biziso*