

Nelson Mandela dies at 95

Written by

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December 5, 2013 – President Barack Obama Thursday declared that Nelson Mandela now belongs to the ages. Former president of South Africa and leader of the African National Congress that overthrew South Africa’s apartheid system at the ballot box, Mandela, 95, died earlier in the day in his Johannesburg home following a three month hospital stay due to a lung infection.

The President recounted Mandela’s stellar life and service to his country and to humanity. Obama said, “At his trial in 1964, Nelson Mandela closed his statement from the dock saying, ‘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 need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.’

“And Nelson Mandela lived for that ideal, and he made it real. He achieved more than could be expected of any man. Today, he has gone home. And we have lost one of the most influential, courageous, and profoundly good human beings that any of us will share time with on this Earth. He no longer belongs to us -- he belongs to the ages,” President Obama said.

“I am one of the countless millions who drew inspiration from Nelson Mandela’s life. My very first political action, the first thing I ever did that involved an issue or a policy or politics, was a protest against apartheid. I studied his words and his writings. The day that he was released from prison gave me a sense of what human beings can do when they’re guided by their hopes and not by their fears. And like so many around the globe, I cannot fully imagine my own life without the example that Nelson Mandela set, and so long as I live I will do what I can to learn from him,” the President said.

“To Graça Machel and his family, Michelle and I extend our deepest sympathy and gratitude for sharing this extraordinary man with us. His life’s work meant long days away from those who loved him the most. And I only hope that the time spent with him these last few weeks brought peace and comfort to his family”, he said.

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"To the people of South Africa, we draw strength from the example of renewal, and reconciliation, and resilience that you made real. A free South Africa at peace with itself -- that's an example to the world, and that's Madiba's legacy to the nation he loved.

"We will not likely see the likes of Nelson Mandela again. So it falls to us as best we can to forward the example that he set: to make decisions guided not by hate, but by love; to never discount the difference that one person can make; to strive for a future that is worthy of his sacrifice.

"For now, let us pause and give thanks for the fact that Nelson Mandela lived -- a man who took history in his hands, and bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice. May God Bless his memory and keep him in peace," President Obama said.



Nelson Mandela spent 27 years as a prisoner in South Africa for opposing apartheid, then emerged to become his country's first Black president, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and an enduring symbol of integrity, principle and resilience.

South African president Jacob Zuma, said in a nationally televised address, "Our nation has lost its greatest son. Our people have lost a father. Although we knew that this day would come, nothing can diminish our sense of a profound and enduring loss."

Zuma said he would be accorded a full state funeral.

Mandela, who once said, "the struggle is my life," was a beloved hero of both South Africa and the world itself. His face was instantly recognizable in virtually any country, his story is famous enough that he was portrayed in movies at least four times - by Morgan Freeman ("Invictus"), Sidney Poitier ("Mandela and de Klerk"), Danny Glover ("Mandela") and Dennis Haysbert ("Goodbye Bafana").

Stamps were issued with his likeness, songs written about him, statues erected in his honor everywhere from Johannesburg to London and more than 50 universities around the world

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awarded him degrees. Even a species of spiders was named in his honor.

In one of his last public appearances, televised in May 2012, Mandela sat in an armchair with a blanket pulled over his lap at his rural home in Qunu and received a symbolic flame to mark the centenary of the African National Congress.

Ironically, the leader hailed as a symbol of peace at one point was on a U.S. terror watch list because of his affiliation with the ANC, which was designated a terrorist organization by South Africa's apartheid government. He was finally taken off the list in 2008.

The man who died an anti-apartheid hero, world statesman and symbol of the strength of the human spirit was born Rolihlahla Mandela in a village near Umtata in the Transkei on July 18, 1918. Rolihlahla literally means "pulling the branch of a tree" but more colloquially, "troublemaker."

After 20 years of leading a non-violent campaign against the South African government, his philosophy switched to armed struggle. In 1964 he was sentenced to life imprisonment for plotting to overthrow the government by violence.

For 18 of his 27 years in prison, he was inmate #46664 on Robben Island, a notorious maximum security facility off Cape Town, where he became a worldwide symbol of resistance to racial oppression.

In 1982, he was moved to Pollsmoor Prison, on the nearby mainland, where he spent much of his time in solitary confinement. In 1985, President P. W. Botha offered to release him if he would renounce armed struggle but he refused, saying "only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts."

Finally released from this third prison, Victor Verster – an event broadcast internationally - on February 11, 1990, he was elected president of the ANC in 1991.

In 1993 he and President Frederik Willem De Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1994, at the age of 75, he was inaugurated as the first black president of South Africa.

Mandela served as president until 1999, when he retired and became an advocate for a number of human rights organizations and also a spokesman for the fight against AIDS. In 2001 he was treated for prostate cancer.

His philosophy of learning to love instead of hate made him one of the moral leaders of his era.

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion," he wrote in his autobiography.

"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."