

South Africans in joyous spirit, mark Mandela's 93rd year

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(GIN) - The birthday of national hero Nelson Mandela was marked with tree planting, children's choruses of Happy Birthday Madiba, and "67 minutes" of good deeds suggested by The Nelson Mandela Foundation. "Read to someone who cannot see, help the elderly with grocery shopping, get tested for HIV with your partner, help a neighbor in need," the Foundation suggested.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged people around the world "to make a difference" by tutoring a child, feeding the hungry or volunteering at a hospital or community center.

Analyst David Africa, writing for Al Jazeera, was one of a few who expressed skepticism at the "re-branding" of Mandela – from fiery youth leader, commander of the armed wing of the African National Congress to peacemaker, moderate and saint.

"The capture of the Mandela icon and his transformation from militant to moderate saint is now almost complete," writes Africa. "And yet, this is not the Mandela that Black South Africans know... Throughout his long imprisonment Mandela refused offers of personal freedom in exchange for abandoning violent resistance to the apartheid government."

"The transition (from apartheid) in South Africa has thus far failed to meet the expectations of the dispossessed and poor," Africa notes. "The economy, land, academia and private institutions remain firmly in the hands of white South Africa, while Black people are expected to be satisfied with the smattering of Black faces in corporate boardrooms.

"In this context the image and legacy of Mandela must be regained to reflect the progressive and restless character of the man himself. The Mandela that is militant, defiant yet deliberate is the one that did, and can again inspire South Africans to continue the struggle for the change the country so desperately needs."

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