

TRIBUTE TO NELSON MANDELA
BY PRIME MINISTER,
THE MOST PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER,
AT JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT,
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“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” – Nelson Mandela
It is not an easy task to reflect on the life of an icon such as Nelson Mandela, a man who has left behind a legacy that is unequalled in its diversity, complexity, and rich history.

- For his children he was simply Papa;
- To his fellow ANC Members and Freedom Fighters he was Comrade and a former Leader;
- To his fellow South Africans he was ‘Madiba’ or ‘Tata’, Father of modern day, non-racial, equal South Africa – the Rainbow Nation;
- To the rest of the world, he was a symbol of the innate qualities that make us human; the embodiment of: kindness, courage, wisdom, honour, humility, dignity and strength of character.

Nelson Mandela will be remembered as one of the finest gifts of humanity; the incarnation of hope; the personification of virtue and majesty; a benchmark that as individuals and as a collective we should strive to emulate, if not to attain.

Our deepest sympathies are with his widow Graça, his surviving children, Makaziwe, Zenani and Zindziswa, his seventeen grandchildren, and fourteen great-grandchildren, other family members and friends.

Allow me to also extend our profound condolences to the people of South Africa, who have lost their first majority elected President; the father of modern South Africa.

Mr. Speaker, there have been only a tiny handful of people throughout the broad span of human history who have gripped the hearts and minds of such wide a cross-section of humanity, as has Nelson Rolohahla Mandela.

His memorial service this past Tuesday was attended by nearly 100 world leaders, including four Presidents of the United States and also of Brazil. It was the largest such gathering since the funeral of Winston Churchill.

What is remarkable and phenomenal about Nelson Mandela has not simply been the universality of his appeal.

He has not just touched all nations and peoples. He has elicited admiration from every single ideological stratum.

He is adored equally by radicals and reactionaries, revolutionaries and revisionists, the religious and the renegades.

No other figure of the last century has been more unifying and stands as a greater symbol of the best in all of us.

Nelson Mandela is not the colossus he is considered to be, simply because he stood so relentlessly and rigorously for liberation, justice and equality. He was ,as President Barack Obama described him, 'the last great liberator of the 20th century'.

He was that and much more.

- Like Gandhi he was a prophet of peace and reconciliation;
- Like Marcus Mosiah Garvey he was a philosopher of black dignity;
- Like Martin Luther King jr. he was a champion of racial equality and..
- Like Abraham Lincoln he knew how to build a team of rivals.

What was truly unique about Nelson Mandela was the combination of virtues in one human being.

He was true to his humility. He never wanted us to forget his humanity and stoutly resisted being considered a saint.

Mr. Speaker,

It is important for us in this Parliament to recognize the extent to which our history and the history of the people of South Africa are interconnected and why the passing of this giant of a leader has meant so much to us.

I am proud of the role that Jamaica played in the liberation struggles for a free South Africa.

- We were the first country in the Western Hemisphere and second only to India in the world to impose trade and travel sanctions on South Africa as early as 1957. That was the signal contribution of the then Premier Norman Washington Manley. It was courageous and defiant.
- Then Prime Minister Hugh Shearer's stout advocacy for human rights at the United Nations in the early 1960s continued our global advocacy for international justice.
- Jamaica played a pivotal role in setting up at the UN the International Convention Against Apartheid in Sport and we played an important role in isolating South Africa in sport.
- We must not forget the role played by Michael Manley in pulling the South together and, indeed, the international community in opposing apartheid.

Jamaica's role in the anti-Apartheid struggle is etched forever in history.

Our politicians, our sports men and women, our artistes, our church men and women and Rastafarian brethren all stood united with our South African brothers and sisters in the struggle.

It is no small wonder that in 1978 Michael Manley was among a group of eminent persons who were awarded the UN gold medal for distinguished service in the struggle against apartheid. It was Manley also who led the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa in 1992 and 1993 and again in 1994 when South Africa had its first democratic election which resulted in Mandela's accession to power.

We adopted the South African struggle as our own, recognizing that the struggle for justice is indivisible.

Jamaicans will always recall the year 1991. It was the second visit the Mandelas made to any country in the world following his release, travelling by way of Cuba. This was in clear recognition of the role Jamaica played in advancing the struggle. I had the privilege of accompanying the then Mrs Mandela on her visit to Jamaica. I will always remember the crowds that flocked Mandela and his then wife, Winnie, throughout their stay on the island.

This was indicative of Jamaica's love and admiration of a man that many of us had come to know through song, through the speeches of former Prime Ministers Manley and Seaga, and through the images from townships across South Africa of people standing in defiance and shouting the name 'Madiba' for inspiration and strength.

Mr. Speaker

Fast-forward twenty-two years since his visit to Jamaica in 1991.

Travelling the many thousands of miles to South Africa provided real, true and invaluable insight into the importance of the work of the man we honour today. It allowed me to see and feel, first hand, the results of over half a century of his struggle.

- It was remarkable to stand in a Stadium just outside of Soweto where the core of the anti Apartheid struggle took place; and to watch South Africans of all races come together to celebrate a man whose life's work was dedicated to ensuring that they should all celebrate together and sing a merged national anthem. **This was the true testament to the life and work of Nelson Mandela**
- It was heartrending to talk with people of South Africa who now speak of the dark elements of Apartheid in the past tense. One young South African told us *"My parents and grandparents told us of the indignity of the 'pencil test'."*

The pencil test, we learned Mr. Speaker, was a convenient means used in south African Schools of classifying students by race – used to determine the extent of their

blackness. Educators would run pencils through the students' hair. If the pencil stood still without moving, the student was classified as black. If it slipped through with relative ease they were classified as coloured, and if that pencil came through unimpeded, it was a determinant that the individual was closer to white.

Of importance was the young man's statement; "*But, this was back in the day*".

Another testament to the life and work of Nelson Mandela!

- It was encouraging to listen to a black South African Journalist on radio interviewing a representative of the last remaining enclave that has defied the integration call and they exchange views without rancor.

Each respectfully sought to understand and ultimately acknowledged the perspective of the other, even as they both know that their perspectives do not at present converge.

Yet another testament to the life and work of Nelson Mandela!

Mr. Speaker, twenty years on, those are clear indices of progress. Some may see them as simply 'soft' indicators. They may not be seen, by some, as important development indices, when compared to the impressive network of highways in South Africa and the first world infrastructure seen in some parts of Pretoria and Johannesburg. Yet, these intangible indicators of progress and development, are what Bishop Desmond Tutu said, in tribute to Mandela, are testament to the great man's instrumental role in '*changing the chemistry of a nation*'.

After over fifty years of struggle, as we pay tribute to the life and work of the man we honour today, we must not only acknowledge but celebrate the extent to which not only the 'chemistry' but also the 'physics' and indeed the biology of the South African nation has changed.

Mandela's success was the social engineering of South Africa into a '*can do nation*'. He sought to engender a national philosophy that transformed an '*anti-culture*' - a culture of perennial opposition, into a united, common '*pro-culture*' - a culture with its eyes on productivity, prosperity, success and growth. Mr. Speaker, '*pro-culture*' development exists where solutions are developed not from a position of antagonism and dissent tinged with apathy and cynicism.

Mandela's legacy must teach us that in developing nations' quests for growth and national development; unity, a common vision and proactive engagement of the people must play a part.

It is true, Mr. Speaker, that like many nations of the world South Africa has not yet got to its ideal position of development. Its place among the BRICS countries of the world indicates that it has advanced along its development journey.

Mr. Speaker, perspective is critical as we assess Mandela's contribution to global development.

Just outside a place called Howick in South Africa a new monument has been erected in Mandela's honour at the site where armed Apartheid police flagged down a vehicle driven by Nelson Mandela, who was pretending to be a chauffeur, on August 5, 1962. On that day Nelson Mandela was captured and imprisoned for the next 27 years. As the cosmos converged in a coincidental irony, that day in history was just one day before Jamaica celebrated its Independence Day.

The designer of the monument at Mandela's capture site, refers to it as '*a forest*' of poles. Each of the fifty steel poles is a tree in its own right. As you walk through the sculpture, it seems to be an odd mixture of poles, each with unique, irregular and seemingly strange indentations, which make very little sense when viewed individually.

However, Mr. Speaker, as you walk 35 metres away from this forest of sticks, a journey that represents Mandela's '*Long road to Freedom*', the laser-cut steel poles become aligned. Visitors to the site stand back from the forest of poles and look back from the new perspective that the distance provides. From that perspective the strange indentations on each 'tree' converge. Magically, mystically the image of Nelson Madiba Mandela then appears.

There are lessons and messages emanating from this magnificent sculpture.

I took away five specific lessons:

- **First.** As art represents life, this sculpture is a true representation of the development process. Often as we walk amongst the trees, we cannot see the forest. Sometimes we cannot see just how far we have come in relation to how far we have to go until we stand back and review our progress. When we do, the pieces seem to come together and the full meaning of our progress and the distance left to go, become apparent.
- **Second.** As developing nations – whether we are the most or least developed, whether we are small island states or emerging economies – I know that we cannot give up in our quest for development. As Madiba himself said, "*It always seems impossible until it is done*". It is not yet done. He has shown us that it is also not impossible.
- **Third.** I know that to find a leader like the great Madiba may never happen again in our lifetimes. Yet, Madiba was representative of the will and desires of his people. If his people did not stand behind him, beside him and with him, bound by the common goal of those who went before him, the transformation would not be possible. As the African proverb says "*Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken*".
- **Fourth.** As leaders, our approach must be one that seeks to advance the cause of our people with integrity, with compassion and humility. Bitterness has no place in the quest for true development. The best tribute we can pay to him, Mr. Speaker, is to emulate his extraordinary life and to see to what extent we can reflect his glory. Let us

in honour of Nelson Mandela determine to rid ourselves of tribalist tendencies! Nelson Mandela was nothing if not an all-embracing consensus-builder who believed in inclusive leadership. What a lesson for us Jamaicans!

....and another important lesson from Mandela's life -

- **Fifth.** As leaders we are the custodians of the dreams of our people. From Soweto to Kingston and everything in between, it is critical that we handle with great care the hopes, dreams and aspirations of our people with the love, respect and reverence Mandela had for the lives and dreams of his people and people of the world.

Mandela's primary struggle was undoubtedly for the freedom of his people. What made him the icon that he is, is that in doing so he provided messages for the rest of us.

At the core of all these messages related to the celebration of Nelson Mandela's life is the African Philosophy that I noticed was inscribed on the wall of the airport lounge. It said, *"Ubuntu: I am because we are because I am"*.

Mr. Speaker:

Nelson Mandela was the embodiment of the better angels of our nature: Optimistic, hopeful, trusting, resilient, compassionate, empathetic, forgiving, loving and accepting of all. He faced adversity and setbacks with a stoic composure. It was his openness to others, his humility, which made him such a great soul.

His hands were steady, his head level, his heart boundless with love and compassion. He was determined to use that power to build bridges, not walls and to bring people together rather than to pull them apart.

When he uttered these words at his inauguration as President in 1994, no one could question their sincerity: He said,

"Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another...the sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement. Let freedom reign". Instead of a blood bath, there was a river of love. Instead of a flood of hatred unleashed, there was a sea of racial harmony which swept across South Africa.

Mandela freed not only oppressed blacks, but those who oppressed them. He recognized that, as our own Rex Nettleford had put it, both the jailed and the jailer are in jail.

Mandela is every person's hero: A man who suffered without being broken; who faced adversity after adversity with indomitable courage; who covered the sins of others with love and who sacrificed his own freedom for that of others.

As Mandela himself said,

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“Difficulties break some men but make others. No axe is sharp enough to cut the soul of a sinner who keeps on trying, one armed with the hope that he will rise even in the end”.

I salute Madiba as indisputably one of the greatest human beings to have illuminated earth's history. I am glad he existed in my lifetime that I could experience such ineffable greatness. Our task is to follow his illustrious example, to learn at his feet and to follow in his footsteps as we make our own long walk to economic freedom for our people.

I close with some words from his autobiography, **The long Walk to Freedom** :

“I have walked the long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter. I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back at the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for freedom comes with responsibilities and I dare not linger for my long walk is not yet ended”.

Walk on, Madiba, into paradise where you have no doubt been greeted by Walter, Oliver, Steve, and others. Walk good and peace be with you.

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