

Mandela: a prophet of unity, peace and reconciliation

Speech by the President of the Councils of State and Ministers of the Republica of Cuba, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, at the international tribute paid to Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg

President Jacob Zuma

Relatives of Nelson Mandela

Distinguished dignitaries

Fraternal people of South Africa

We pay emotional tribute to Nelson Mandela, the ultimate symbol of dignity and unwavering dedication to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and justice; a prophet of unity, peace and reconciliation.

Alongside his comrades in the struggle, he led his people in the battle against apartheid, to open the way to a new South Africa; a non racial and united South Africa in its quest for happiness, equality and the wellbeing of all its children, a nation bent on overcoming the consequences of colonialism, slavery and racial segregation.

Setting an example of integrity and perseverance, he later headed the effort to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and create opportunities for all.

Mandela offers an insurmountable example to Latin America and the Caribbean, which are

currently moving towards unity and integration for the benefit of their peoples, on the basis of respect for diversity, and convinced that it is through dialogue and cooperation that discrepancies can be resolved and a civilized relationship established between those who think differently.

As Mandela's life teaches us, only the concerted efforts of all nations will empower Humanity to respond to the enormous challenges threatening its very existence.

Cuba, a country born in the struggle for independence and for the abolition of slavery, and whose children have African blood running in their veins, has had the privilege of fighting and building alongside the African nations.

We shall never forget Mandela's moving homage to our common struggle when on the occasion of his visit to our country on July 26, 1991 he said that "the Cuban people have a special place in the hearts of the peoples of Africa."

I remember his bond of affection with Fidel Castro, a symbol of the fraternal relations between Africans and Cubans. Fidel has said: "Nelson Mandela will not go down in history for the 27 consecutive years he spent incarcerated without ever renouncing his ideas. He will go down in history because he was capable of cleaning-up his soul from the poison that such an unfair punishment could have planted there; and for his generosity and wisdom, which at the moment of victory allowed him to lead with great talent his selfless and heroic people, knowing that the new South Africa could not be built on hatred and vengeance."

Eternal honour and glory to Nelson Mandela and to the heroic people of South Africa!

Thank you.