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STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**ON
THE INTRODUCTION AND ADOPTION OF THE
RESOLUTION ENTITLED "NELSON MANDELA
INTERNATIONAL DAY"**

**NEW YORK
9TH NOVEMBER 2009**

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Mr President,

On behalf of the Government and people of South Africa, I have the great honor and privilege to introduce draft resolution, A/64/L.13 proclaiming 18 July, the birthday of Nelson Mandela, as “Nelson Mandela International Day”.

I also do so on behalf of the 120 co-sponsors listed in A/64/L.13 and thank these countries for their co-sponsorship and unwavering support. In particular, we would like to thank the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) for their support and endorsement of this initiative.

Mr President,

On 18 July 2009, millions of people from across the globe came together to give 67 minutes or more of their time in community service, their actions inspired by the life’s work of Nelson Mandela. In turn, the actions of these million of people, men, women and youth across the globe and from all sectors of society, including Heads of State, Governments, NGO’s and civil society, have inspired us to introduce this draft resolution to the General Assembly.

Mr President,

During the dark days of apartheid, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela said. “To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” And when the chains of apartheid were severed in our country, he embodied these words, showing that both the victors and the vanquished could live in peace.

Mandela’s leadership through South Africa’s most terrible and triumphant times are enough to make him an enduring hero in our history books. His legacy however, is even larger than this. Through his extraordinary actions and personality, he has become a moral compass that we can all look upto.

Indeed, Nelson Mandela is an international icon and a symbol of hope for the oppressed and marginalized people across the globe. He has dedicated his life in the service of humanity and has contributed greatly to the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world. Nelson Mandela worked tirelessly in the struggle for democracy and for the promotion and protection of human rights internationally.

Nelson Mandela’s contribution to conflict resolution, reconciliation, rights of children and the upliftment of the poor is acknowledged across the world. He has been bestowed with numerous awards and honors, including the Nobel Peace Prize. But even at such times of great recognition, he has been selfless. A memorable example was when he

dedicated his Nobel Peace Award to, “ all the courageous people of my country, black and white, who have suffered and endured so much.”

Nelson Mandela has become one of the greatest leaders, who supported and steadfastly promoted the ideals of the United Nations. The ideals of the United Nations, represented by the victory of unity over division, of negotiation over confrontation, are the ideals mirrored by Nelson Mandela throughout his life.

Mr. President,

Perhaps the only fitting way to pay tribute to this great man is to look back at his public and political life. Therefore, permit me to provide some glimpses of Nelson Mandela, through his own eyes and words.

On 20 April, 1964, standing trial in Rivonia for Treason for leading the ANC’s struggle against the Apartheid State, Nelson Mandela spoke for hours in his own defense, knowing that a sentence of death was a possibility. He said,

“I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideals 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 needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Upon his release from brutal and inhumane incarceration for 27 years, Nelson Mandela, addressed the South African people and said,

“I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands.”

He had one regret that day, however. There were so many reporters and cameras and supporters around him the moment he set foot from prison that he did not have a chance to say goodbye to the prison staff, who he cherished because they had been his only link to humanity for so long.

On 10 May, 1994, Nelson Mandela stood tall before a crowd of people in Pretoria after taking the oath of office as the first democratically elected President of a free South Africa and said,

“The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.”

Having decided to retire from public office, Mandela addresses the General Assembly of the United Nations on 21 September 1998, for the final time. He stated that the social ills

of the world do not stem from the forces of nature or a curse of the deities, but from the decisions that people make or refuse to make. And he urged that all those in this great hall:

“Not allow that any should be denied their freedom as we were; that any should be turned into refugees as we were; that any should be condemned to go hungry as we were; that any should be stripped of their human dignity as we were.”

And he goes on to say:

“Then would history and the billions throughout the world proclaim that it was right that we dreamt and that we toiled to give life to a workable dream.”

Mr President

Nelson Mandela is not a god, or a saint. He is simply a man who has acted in manner that is a little wiser, a little stronger, a little better than the rest of us. This is evident from his words,

“I have walked that 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 on the distance I have come. But I can rest only a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and with I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended”.

It is in this spirit that we the people of South Africa pledge to work together in reviving UBUNTU, to create a better society for all and to make a positive contribution to humanity, built on compassion, humility, respect, forgiveness and unity.

Mr President,

The adoption of this resolution by the General Assembly, should serve as a constant reminder of the need to answer the question the man himself posed to this Assembly when he said,

“The great challenge of our age to the United Nations Organization is to answer the question-given the interdependence of nations of the world, what is it that we can and must do to ensure that democracy, peace and prosperity prevail everywhere!”

It is our hope that the entire membership of the United Nations co-sponsor the draft resolution and that every year beginning in 2010, the United Nations, the international community and indeed the world will celebrate 18 July as Nelson Mandela International Day.

Mr President,

In doing so, we make the moral compass of Nelson Mandela a little brighter and bigger so that we can see it all the more clearly, as we strive in this great hall to realize the workable dream of Nelson Mandela.

I thank you.