

**Statement of the President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly
on the occasion of the Nelson Mandela International Day
18 July 2018
United Nations, New York**

Mr. Secretary-General, Madam Minister, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues and Friends,

We are here to celebrate the legacy of Nelson Mandela. And I want to start by being very frank. Unlike others in the room, I did not know Mr. Mandela personally. So, I will not attempt to give you my own impression of him – or talk about his personal attributes. Instead, I want to reflect on some lessons from his life. They are lessons which, I think, we could all stand to learn from. But they are particularly crucial for those of us who work and serve under the United Nations' blue flag.

The first is about dialogue. Nelson Mandela taught us that dialogue is one of the most powerful tools available to humanity. He knew that conflict and violence drag us back. But that talking can drive us forward. And he showed us that dialogue and negotiation should be pursued relentlessly – no matter how deep the divides, or strong the hurt.

This Organisation – the United Nations - was established as a global hub for dialogue. It was designed to give all nations in the world a place to talk about their differences – instead of bringing them to the battlefield. The General Assembly now includes 193 Member States. In it, even countries with vastly different positions or interests can sit together - sometimes side by side. So, when we use this forum... to talk to... to engage with... to listen to... and to learn from each other – *including* those we disagree with - we are honouring Nelson Mandela's legacy.

The second lesson is about peace. Nelson Mandela understood that peace is not, simply, the absence of conflict. He knew that it must be something deeper. It must be a culture. And it must live *in* people – not, just, in their actions. And I believe President Mandela was one of the first world leaders to really draw our attention to the root causes of conflict and instability. Even after being elected South Africa's first black president –and averting civil conflict - he refused to take peace for granted. He dedicated himself to the eradication of poverty. He put a huge amount of time and effort into opening up South Africa's education system. He worked to make national institutions more representative. And he prioritised reconciliation among his people.

Nelson Mandela described peace as “more precious than diamonds or silver or gold”. So, it is clear he understood its value. And that everything must be done, to keep it alive, when there is still time. And I think that is a major lesson to remind ourselves of today. Too often we have let peace slip through our fingers. And we have waited until it was gone, to act. Now we are moving towards a more proactive, preventive model – which prioritises investment in peace, rather than responding to its loss. I saw huge support for these efforts, when world leaders came here, to talk about Sustaining Peace, in April. And, as we continue this work, Nelson Mandela can inspire us all.

The third and final lesson today is about tolerance. When President Mandela addressed the United Nations for the first time, he reminded his audience why this Organisation was created: He said, “The United Nations was born out of the titanic struggle against Nazism and fascism, with their pernicious doctrines and practices of racial superiority and genocide”. And he went on to dedicate his life to making sure these phenomena could not take root, again. He stood up

against injustice, oppression and racism. And he took every opportunity he had, to remind us all of our own humanity.

I think Archbishop Desmond Tutu was right on the mark, when he described Nelson Mandela as the “The Prophet of Tolerance”. The prophet is no longer with us. But his teachings *are*. And we need them - now, more than ever. All over the world, we are seeing worrying rises in the trends that Nelson Mandela fought against. Intolerance. Hate. Inhumanity. Racism. Prejudice. Discrimination. We cannot be silent in the face of them. We need to push back harder – and to speak out louder - than ever.

Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

Nelson Mandela saw things others did not. He sacrificed things others would not. And, he believed when others could not. In his country. In his people. In the future of Africa. And, in humanity. We need to celebrate his legacy. Not just through this event today. But also through our everyday lives. Whether that means our work for the United Nations, our role within our communities, or the way we see and treat the people around us. Let us pay tribute, to him, through our own humanity.

I thank you.