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Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha Addresses the Press on behalf of the AU Commission

The Life and Legacy of Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela “Madiba”

The Man Nelson Mandela

The African Union (AU) is saddened by the news of the death of Africa’s illustrious and transformational leader, H.E. Nelson Mandela, former President of the Republic of South Africa, who passed away on the 5th December 2013. Today as we mourn his loss, we wish to pay tribute to his life and legacy in Africa, especially his efforts to promote democracy, freedom and equality not only in his home country South Africa, but across Africa and the world.

Nelson Mandela will be remembered as a symbol for wisdom, for the ability to change and the power of reconciliation. His life and Legacy is the biggest lesson, motivation, inspiration and commitment an African can give to Africa.

In his early life Mandela, grew in a society that did not recognize his being; that defiled his humanity and dignity, caged his freedom, denied him opportunities and relegated him to a lesser state of living. However, in those circumstances, Mandela thrived. Madiba created opportunities for himself where many could see none. He set himself apart by constant dedication, his faith, vision and above all, the focus on a dream to achieve freedom for his humanity and mankind. His greatest gift to humanity was sacrifice, love and respect. From his release from prison in 1990 to his last moments with us, Madiba greatest lesson to humanity was the declaration of freedom for all; freedom not in the mainstream sense of individual freedom but freedom that cut across humanity. In his exact words “*For 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*”

Legacy for Africans

Like so many others past and present, H.E. Nelson Mandela fought for Africa's progress. Although his passing is a great loss to the continent, the continent has drawn inspiration from his life and legacy as he showed us that it was possible to create lasting change, peace and stability even in the most challenging circumstances. Because of his choices, the continent has moved forward from decades of struggle and apartheid to one of great hope, freedom and racial harmony. The end of apartheid brought the new phase of Africa, moving Africa away from the focus on decolonization to democracy, development and African integration.

While his apartheid struggle brought Africans together to fight colonialism, his post-apartheid life brought about greater integration, political stability and development, all of which are cardinal to AU's commitment for a new Africa.

As a Commission, we can only but draw lesson from Madiba's life. On Peace and political stability, Mandela has shown that **"We"** is more important than **"I"**. His political life symbolized "Us" and he brought political stability in post-apartheid South Africa through peace and reconciliation.

In his speech made to the African Union in Ouagadougou 1998, he wrote, and I quote: "The successor generation can and must reaffirm...that our countries and people's are bound together by the reality of a common destiny for our continent...that common destiny requires that we should treat the question of peace and stability on our continent as a common challenge" (Ouagadougou, June 8, 1998)

Today, we celebrate his life and will work to ensure that his legacy will leave on in the work of the African Union in forging towards an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

Rest well and Fare thee well Madiba!

Thank you