

## **Happy birthday Madiba, the revolutionary!**

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By President Thabo Mbeki

Tomorrow, a day after his 90th birthday, we will be privileged, once more, to spend an entire day with Nelson Mandela. This will be at his home village in Qunu as family, friends, colleagues and comrades gather to celebrate nine decades of a life spent mostly in pursuit of human freedom and well-being.

It will be an occasion in which all of us will renew our commitment to the values for which Mandela, the revolutionary and leader, has stood for all his adult life.

As we mark the 90th birthday of one of the outstanding leaders of our people, Isithwalandwe, we cannot but pay tribute to the gods who bequeathed to our nation and the world so outstanding an embodiment of ubuntu. His life and work have served as an embodiment of what human beings should be, in themselves and to others.

Mandela understood the declaration of his contemporary, the Martinique revolutionary, Franz Fanon, when he said: "Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it."

Thus, in a statement that resonated with Fanon's, Mandela, speaking at the opening of the defence case in the Rivonia Trial in the Pretoria Supreme Court on April the 20th 1964, concluded, in part:

"I have cherished the ideal 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."

We are proud as South Africans that Mandela and his generation of fighters against colonialism embraced with both passion and reason the mission that history imposed on them; and more than met the demands that it enjoined them to fulfill. All of us as South Africans glow in the light of fame in part because we stand on the shoulders of this and other giants. In turn, we can only draw pride from the fact that a leader who strides the world with such confidence and authority has suckled from the nation's bosom. That Nelson Mandela continues to inspire a large majority of humanity speaks to the global pertinence of the values he represents: in one phrase, a better life for all!

In the same way that his generation had to discover and fulfil its mission, so should current and future generations return to the question of their mission and how to fulfil it, as conditions and circumstances evolve.

Finding answers to this question simultaneously as we celebrate his birthday is perhaps the biggest present we can give to Nelson Mandela. Many happy returns: ukhule ukhokhobe!