

## Nelson Mandela: the Passing of a Giant

December 6, 2013

Dear Colleagues and Students,

The headline writers have proclaimed that the world "lost a giant among men" last evening with the passing of Nelson Mandela at the age of 95.

Indeed, that is true. South Africa's liberator and emancipator was a giant. But he was more than that. He was a profound example for all the world of quiet dignity, an indefatigable spirit and, ultimately, of the unassailable notion that peace and reconciliation among all people is a sacrifice in which we all must share.

At his trial, just before being ferried across shark-infested waters to the brutal prison on Robben Island, Mandela said "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realized. But my Lord, if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

He was 44. Mandela would be 71 when finally released from prison, his captors forced into submission by the shame of the world and the humble, but proud and unyielding example of this regal, eloquent statesman.

His body had been shackled, but his mind and spirit were always free -- an idea his captors never fully understood. Yet, during and after his imprisonment, as he ascended to the very offices once held by those who enslaved him, Mandela always chose the kind word over disdain, humility over self-importance, and peaceful resolution over violence and conflict.

I had the opportunity several years ago to travel to South Africa. It was a deeply moving experience to walk in some of these places like Robben Island, places that had been symbols of fear and repression, but that Mandela transformed into examples of the triumph of hope and freedom.

Finally, he knew that the price of freedom and equality was steep, and that journey -- for all of us -- would have no end.

"After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb," he said. "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 for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."

Let us always remember his profound example, realizing that our journey toward reconciliation and peace can never end, either. He was a giant among men. Let us linger long enough in the large shadow he cast over us to find strength and the courage to act as he always did -- on behalf of humanity, on behalf of peace.

Eli Capilouto  
President