

**Statement of the SACC NEC , SACLI and Church Leaders on Madiba
August 7, 2013**

The National Executive Committee of the South African Council of Churches, together with the South African Christian Leaders Initiative and the Heads of member churches met today to deliberate on a number of matters concerning the life of the Church and the nation. There was a special focus on the person and health of the Father of our Constitutional Democracy, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and his family at this time. We resolved, to pray with the Mandela Family and to thank them for their role in the preservation and well-being of this national heritage that our generation has been blessed to experience – Madiba.

We thank God that he has recently celebrated the great age of 95, and thereby rightfully earn the title of national living ancestor. In that 95 years he has lived many different and very full lives that each have a lesson for our society:

- as a precocious young man in a rural community;
- as an energetic young activist for justice and freedom
- as a revolutionary leader
- as a man of principle in the face of adversity, trial and tribulation
- as a model prisoner of conscience and invisible sign of hope
- as a national reconciler and world statesman
- as a philanthropist and civil society energiser for social good

In a short summary of the highlights of that life we can highlight the influence of his silent moments: In prison for 27 years, he became the iconic symbol of a liberated future, and his release opened an avalanche of emotions of hope. It is this that readied the nation to respond to his political gift of the disposition of reconciliation to which he challenged us. For this reason all South Africans are happy to recognize him as the Father of our Constitutional Democracy.

The past weeks when Madiba has been ill in hospital have been his second significant silent moment; and we have been asking ourselves what the message of this time is for us as a nation and what challenge he is placing before us.

His family and all of us have witnessed the amazing waves upon waves of prayers and good wishes; the turning of his hospital address into a national shrine and beacon of national unity where young and old, poor and rich, rural and urban, various religious and faith traditions, foreign nationals and South Africans alike, have come to stake their place in the unity of comfort and succour under the Great Baobab that Madiba represents in the serenity of his hospital bed.

Recently Mrs Machel made a salutary point when she pointed out that in his extended illness Madiba has offered the country for the second time, the opportunity to unite. She said:

“This is the second time where Madiba offered his nation an opportunity to be united under the banner of our flag and under the banner of our constitution, where we feel equal in the love for him and in the love for our country. We feel all of us equal, equal in the love for him and more importantly, it has to be in the love for our country”.

Many have remarked that the first gift of reconciliation did not unite us, it made us tolerant of each other at best. Now God is using Madiba in his extended illness, to present to us a fresh challenge to unite behind the values that he represents, and that should be the agenda of our nation, in our homes, in our communities, our schools, our institutions and organs of State.

We are a privileged generation to have lived in the times of Nelson Mandela. We are honoured to occupy such a ‘historic space’. Many generations to come will wish that they could have been present during this time but they wouldn’t be able to.

The challenge presented by such a privilege is that it comes with responsibility, and that is how the world will judge our generation. The question is going to be how we used such a privileged position to make our country and the world what it should be – and we dare say ‘to make the world what God wanted it to be’. God is presenting Madiba to us during this time, as a witness and conscience to us to re-look at ourselves and ask the question: “where are we and where are we going?”

When we started as a new nation under Madiba in 1994 every one in the world applauded us. We looked like we were about to create heaven on earth! The best example of what the world should be. When we travelled around the world we were treated with awe and respect. Everyone internationally who had an idea to make the world better they wanted to bring it here in South Africa. We were expected to be incorruptible with capacity to defeat racism and poverty. We were to be like the Kingdom of God!

Are we today striving to reach those heights or are we beginning to wallow in greed and self-interests? What has happened to us? Like Jesus on his way to the Cross, who said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for

yourselves and for your children”, Madiba in the quiet dignity of his illness, is calling on us to weep not for him, for he has given us the tools to be the best we can be, but we should weep for ourselves and our failure to unify behind his values and noble example.

Madiba called for an RDP of the soul, which should translate into a social transformation of values and the making of a society united in honour and integrity; for this we each have to take responsibility and play our role.

We proclaim a message of hope and challenge that comes from Madiba’s current illness. We believe that Madiba is God’s gift to us yet again. God, who never fails to inspire hope, has given us Madiba as a message for this moment, and through him God is rekindling our spirit of national unity in the consciousness of what Madiba represents, to inspire our hope. Our challenge is in the responsibility that comes with that consciousness.

In this context the churches are calling for united action to make the best of Madiba’s values our pattern of social conduct – lest it be said of our generation, “you did not know the time of your visitation!” For the unity we perceive as Madiba’s second gift to us is a unity of principle, not unity for unity’s sake; but a unity that makes the noble values of social good become the pinnacle of our national unity, a unity that is in God’s design for the common good. In the historic words of the Divine Intention by Bishop Desmond Tutu on behalf of the SACC before the 1982 Eloff Commission, we say:

“This was God’s intention for the entire universe because unity means peace, prosperity, fellowship, justice, wholeness, compassion, love and joy, etc., conveyed in the virtually untranslatable Hebrew word Shalom”.

In the months ahead we shall be unpacking under God, a range of action proposals with our churches, to look at how we each have contributed to the decline of the Mandela Promise, and seek to have us pick up the second Mandela Gift of unity in action for a better South Africa, and a better world.

Footnote:

South African Council of Churches (SACC)

National Executive Committee

South African Christian Leaders Initiative (SACLI)

SACLI is a movement of people made up of the South African Council of Churches, The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, Kairos SA and African Enterprise, churches and Christians across SA

Church Leaders in attendance:

Bishop Jo Seoka (President: SACC) – read the statement

Bishop Zipho Siwa (Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of SA)

Dr Jerry Pillay (General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of SA)

Bishop Malusi (Ethiopian Episcopal Church of SA)

Rev Moss Ntlha (General Secretary of The Evangelical Alliance of SA and Chairperson of SACLI)

Rev Hermy Damons (NEC member of The Evangelical Alliance of SA)

Ms. Rinel Hugo (NEC member of SACC)

Mr. Marcus Van Wyk (Coordinator: SACLI)

Dr Prince Dibeela (General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of SA)

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