Remarks at the Interdenominational Service for
the Memorial of President Nelson Mandela

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President

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Thank you all, thank you friends.

Dear Friends, Good morning.

We are here to mourn but also to celebrate an extraordinary life that touched the hearts of millions.

We are here, all faiths, to celebrate the life of Madiba, God’s gift to Africa and humanity in the 20th Century, the icon of our time.

We are here to give our farewell to this towering figure who offered his life to make South Africa, Africa and the World a better place.

A giant, a colossus of humanity, who brought the entire World Leadership (current and past) in that stadium in Soweto two days ago.

A Leader, who even in death, brings about that handshake between friends and foes alike.

Dear Friends,

Eulogies for Madiba, much more powerful than anything I can say here today are being given the World over.

Achieving freedom for his people and enlarging freedoms for us all. Courage-Resilience-Compassion-Forgiveness-Humility.

Mandela came into life at the end of World War I - at a time when colonialism and racial discrimination were deepening their roots in Africa.

Elsewhere in the continent, victors of this European War for the control of the World were carving out the continent to serve their interests.

Madiba is now gone from this life, but he can rest in peace knowing he completed the decolonization of Africa on the day he assumed power - on that glorious sunny day in 1994.

He and his comrades paid a high price.

Taken to jail at the prime of his life for demanding and organizing to fight for the basic God given rights; that today you and I, and indeed many young South Africans take for granted.

That all God’s children - black, white, yellow and everything in between - people of every faith, are equal and have rights to the same opportunities irrespective of the circumstances of their birth.
Today, it is hard to understand that, for demanding that basic right for all South Africans, Mandela had to spend 27 years in that tiny cold room on that barren island, a former leper colony.

Like those of you who have visited Robben Island, which I have done on two occasions, I have wondered each time at man’s ability to do evil.

But what has always been a source of strength is also the knowledge that there are men and women who will always resist that type of evil, when they, like Madiba are determined to do so.

Many people of all colors, in South Africa, in Africa, the World over, were part of this resistance.

Mandela and his comrades paid a high price, and for some, like Steve Biko, the ultimate sacrifice. In so doing, they released the entire Nation from prison.

For white people too were in the prison of fear.

The writer, John Micklethwaite, writing in the Economist in 2012, made a rather important point about the way we tend to think of politics.

The first level of thinking about politics is the phenomenon we see every four or five years.

Individuals and parties campaigning (often on fairly marginal differences in policy), to determine who is it that emerges the winner.

One or other party or individual wins an election, becomes President, PM, Majority, minority party, coalitions etc., are formed pending the next election.

The second level is what happens once in a lifetime - or even a century - a titanic battle for ideas: left or rightwing, the welfare state, neoliberalism etc.

I could go on and on.

The best illustration of this is the epic battle is the struggle (which began in Poland with the likes of Lech Walesa and the Solidarity movement), between capitalism and communism, culminating in the defeat of communism in 1989 in Europe.

An eminent person, Prof. Fukuyama even authored a book - “the End of History”.

Once in a while, this type of paradigm shift is accompanied by civil war, revolution, though not always.

As I contemplate this day, I would like to posit that there is a third level from which one should view the political combat.

That unique, historic and rare moment when a Leader emerges to fight evil and to say “Let my people go.”
It is when a Leader emerges and brings down a seemingly powerful system through peaceful revolution through the sheer force of his persona and personal sacrifice.

Mandela did not only bring down an evil system through personal sacrifice and his persona, he also liberated the whole of South Africa and mankind.

Martin Luther King, Aung Sung Kyi amongst them, have fought for their people against slavery, and for civil rights and equality for all.

But no one in living memory has had to fight an evil such as apartheid.

Madiba, a man who, when offered to be released in 1985 on condition that he renounced violence, said “no, only free men negotiate, prisoners do not “.

Over the last few days, many people have said, “let us keep Mandela’s legacy”.

We have no other choice, if we want a better world.

As President Obama observed, two days ago at the memorial ceremony - to paraphrase him – All of us Leaders in the World today should put the hand to our heart and ask “I’m I in the footsteps of Mandela keeping that legacy alive?”

Mandela taught us many things – including sacrifice, love, and tolerance - but I will pick only three:

- First, be ready to fight for what you believe in, and never give up your core values. The price could be high. The apartheid regime learnt of the steely resolve of Madiba on this.

- However, be ready to listen to the fears of those on the other side, the spirit of genuine reconciliation. They do not have to lose so that you win. We can both win.

- Realise you are human. None of us has all the knowledge, solutions. So beware of sycophancy.

These are lessons those of us privileged to lead in Africa, at this time, must not forget.

The evil that Mandela had to fight was one based on color and bigotry.

That kind of evil, however, has no color, nationality or religion.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed by that evil man General Sani Abacha despite Mandela’s repeated pleas.

 Millions perished under the terror inflicted by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Evil has no gender.
In my own country, as Mandela was assuming office in 1994, a million people were being killed (in only three months).

Some of those perpetrators were women; those who give life, yet evil to the extent of killing babies and children because their birth circumstances were different.

Today, many people in the World are deprived of their humanity, freedoms, property or voice simply because of their ideas, religious group or ethnic origin.

A lot of evil happens in the world because we are accomplices, or at the very least, bystanders.

How many nations and Leaders in the World, either by their acts of omission or commission, were accomplices in Mandela’s incarceration?

Some even said, reflecting the lexicon of the day, that their refusal to support his cause was part of the fight against global communism!

As we say goodbye to Madiba, it is not the time to look backward. Indeed, he would have liked us to look to the future.

From time to time, history brings forth giants.

Mandela was such a historical giant, a colossus of our time.

Madiba sacrificed to free his people. But not only his people.

Through his courageous acts, he also was able to free the perpetrators locked in fear.

By his sacrifice, he was able to chart a better future for Africa and her people.

We cannot replace Madiba. No one can.

But today, each one of us has a duty.

The very first time I met President Mandela was, I believe around 2001, when he was the mediator for the Burundi civil war, having just replaced Mwalimu Julius Nyerere who had passed on.

I will never forget the man I saw that day – character, discipline, empathy and clarity of vision. I will never forget that day.

As we extend our condolences to the family of Madiba and the People of South Africa, those of us here today; who play a modest but vital role in the transformation of Africa, must bear in mind that Madiba leaves us a big assignment.

Remember what he said about poverty: “Millions of people are trapped in the prison of poverty – set them free; like slavery and apartheid, poverty is man-made. It can be overcome.”
We cannot afford to fail. And we shall not fail.

Let us ask ourselves, each day, if Madiba woke up and asked how we are doing?

Let each one of us in a position of influence, big or small, be able to say,

Sleep well Madiba.

Your sacrifices were not in vain.

That is the best way to honour Madiba’s memory.

Thank you all and God bless Africa.