

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON NELSON MANDELA INTERNATIONAL DAY

New York, 18 July 2017

Nelson Mandela continues to inspire the world through his example of courage and compassion, and his commitment to social justice and a culture of freedom and peace.

I had the honour of meeting Nelson Mandela several times, including during South Africa's transition. Each time, I was struck by his wisdom, his compassion, and above all, his humility.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from Nelson Mandela is that to make progress, we must look forward, however difficult that may be.

Nelson Mandela was known as prisoner 46664 for 18 years. But he never became a prisoner of his past. Sentenced to hard labour and solitary confinement on Robben Island, he rose above suffering and indignity to lead his country, and our world, to a brighter day.

He did not succumb to bitterness or personal animosity, but poured his formidable energy into realizing his vision of a peaceful, multi-ethnic, democratic South Africa.

Nelson Mandela once said a saint could be defined as a sinner who keeps on trying. That is a powerful message of hope, in a world riven with fear and cynicism. It is never too late to face the future, and try again.

Today, as we commemorate Nelson Mandela's lifetime of service, the best tribute we can pay this great man is not words or in ceremonies, but actions that improve our world.

Each of us can make a difference in promoting peace, human rights, sustainable development, and lives of dignity for all. Each of us can be inspired by Nelson Mandela's example, and by his famous words: It always seems impossible until it's done.

Let us all build on the legacy of Nelson Mandela.