Mandela inspired by Declaration of Human Rights

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The United Nations has paid tribute to Nelson Mandela, South Africa´s first black president who died yesterday at the age of 95.

On behalf of the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon extended in a statement his „deepest condolences to the people of South Africa and especially to Nelson Mandela's family and loved ones."

Mr. Ban said that Mandela´s 1994 address to the General Assembly, as the first democratically elected President of a free South Africa, was a defining moment. „In the decades-long fight against apartheid, the United Nations stood side-by-side with Nelson Mandela and all those in South Africa who faced unrelenting racism and discrimination," the Secretary-General said in a statement.

Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a fellow South African, noted that when Mandela was released after 27 years in prison, there was a burning desire in the country to „discriminate against those who had so ruthlessly discriminated against us."

"He turned it all around with words. He told us to throw our spears and guns into the sea. He told us to set aside our desire for vengeance and work for a South Africa not just free of racism,

but free of all types of discrimination. He showed us that a better future depended on reconciliation, not revenge."

Pillay pointed out that Mandela had drawn strength from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during his incarceration on Robben Island. „ In his last address to the UN General Assembly in September 1998, he noted how the Universal Declaration had validated the struggle against apartheid, but also posed the challenge that "our freedom, once achieved, should be dedicated to the implementation of the perspectives contained in the Declaration."

In a statement on behalf of the members of the Security Council, Gérard Araud, of France, the President of the SC noted that the 2009 adoption of Nelson Mandela International Day ,was the first ever international day in honour of an individual. "The members of the Security Council consider this to be a reflection of the magnitude of Nelson Mandela's contribution to freedom and justice. Nelson Mandela Day is a celebration of the idea that each individual has the power to transform the world, and the ability to make an impact, just as Nelson Mandela did himself."

 Photo: Nelson Mandela, Deputy President of the African National Congress of South Africa, raises his fist in the air while addressing the Special Committee Against Apartheid in the General Assembly Hall.
22 June 1990. UN-Photo/Pernaca Sudhakaran.