



Nelson Mandela's appearance at the United Nations as the first democratically elected President of South-Africa was a landmark both for the world organization and Mr. Mandela personally. In a memorable speech to the General Assembly 3 October 1994 (see: "Mandela's landmark speech at the UN"), Mr. Mandela said it was a moving moment for him since he stood among friends and people of conscience. "We know this because we know what you did over the decades to secure my release and the release of other South African political prisoners from Pretoria's dungeons."

The South African president continued to salute the United Nations and its Member states "for joining forces with the masses of our people in a common struggle that has brought about our emancipation and pushed back the frontiers of racism."

Partners in the struggle against apartheid

The elimination of South Africa's system of legalized racial discrimination known as apartheid was on the agenda of the United Nations from its inception. On 22 June 1946 the Indian government requested that the discriminatory treatment of Indians in the Union of South Africa be included on the agenda of the very first session of the General Assembly.

In the decades that followed the world body would contribute to the global struggle against apartheid by drawing world attention to the inhumanity of the system, legitimizing popular resistance, promoting anti-apartheid actions by governmental and non-governmental organizations, instituting an arms embargo, and supporting an oil embargo and boycotts of apartheid in many fields.

From the call to end apartheid...

The first major UN declaration on apartheid came on 2 December 1950 when the General Assembly declared that 'a policy of 'racial segregation' (apartheid) is necessarily based on doctrines of racial discrimination';

A decade later the Security Council in its first action on South Africa adopted Resolution 134 deploring the policies and actions of the South African government in the wake of the killing of 69 peaceful African protesters in Sharpeville by the police on 21 March. The Council called upon the government to abandon its policies of apartheid and racial discrimination.

Three years later, in 1963 the Special Committee against Apartheid met for the first time. On 7 August the same year, the Security Council adopted Resolution 181 calling upon all States to cease the sale and shipment of arms, ammunition and military vehicles to South Africa. The arms embargo was made mandatory on 4 November 1977.

1963 also saw the General Assembly Resolution (on the question of Namibia), urging all States to refrain from supplying petroleum to South Africa. It was the first of many efforts by the UN to enact effective oil sanctions against apartheid.

Five years later, 1968, the General Assembly requested all States and organisations 'to suspend cultural, educational, sporting and other exchanges with the racist regime and with organisations or institutions in South Africa which practice apartheid.

In 1984, the Security Council declared null and void the new racist constitution of South Africa.

When the General Assembly adopted by consensus the 'Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa,' calling for negotiations to end apartheid and establish a non-racial democracy, the end of apartheid was already in sight.

.....to Mandela Day

Nelson Mandela was freed from jail in early 1990 and made his first appearance at the UN on 22 June 1990 when he addressed the Special Committee against Apartheid in New York .

10 May 1994 Mr. Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa's first black president. 23 June 1994 and subsequently the item of apartheid was removed from the agenda of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

On 3 October 1994, the first democratically elected president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, addressed the General Assembly.

On 10 November 2009, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a resolution which declared 18 July, the birthday of Nelson Mandela, as the "Nelson Mandela International Day", to be observed each year beginning in 2010.