



NELSON
MANDELA

In his words

EXCERPTS FROM SPEECHES, 1961 - 2008



Nelson Mandela is a living embodiment of the highest values of the United Nations.

Through long years in prison, he maintained a steadfast belief in justice and human equality. Upon his release, he reconciled with those who persecuted him most. And he led the way toward a democratic, multi-racial South Africa. To this day, he works tirelessly for peace and human dignity throughout the world. His engagement in the fight against AIDS broke new ground against stigma.

He is an exemplary global citizen.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

In November 2009, the UN General Assembly declared 18 July “Nelson Mandela International Day” in recognition of the former South African President’s contribution to the culture of peace and freedom.

The General Assembly resolution (A/RES/64/13) recognizes Nelson Mandela’s leading role in Africa’s liberation and in promoting African unity. The resolution also recognizes his values and his dedication to the service of humanity, in the fields of conflict resolution, race relations, the promotion and protection of human rights, reconciliation, gender equality and the rights of children and other vulnerable groups, as well as the upliftment of poor and underdeveloped communities. It acknowledges his contribution to the struggle for democracy internationally and the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world.



ON FREEDOM

“Our march to freedom is irreversible. We must not allow fear to stand in our way.”



Nelson Mandela walks to freedom after more than two decades in prison, accompanied by his then wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela | 11 February 1990, Paarl, South Africa | Photo / Graeme Williams

Those who are voteless cannot be expected to continue paying taxes to a government which is not responsible to them. People who live in poverty and starvation cannot be expected to pay exorbitant house rents to the government and local authorities. We furnish the sinews of agriculture and industry. We produce the work of the gold mines, the diamonds and the coal, of the farms and industry, in return for miserable wages. Why should we continue enriching those who steal the products of our sweat and blood? Those who exploit us and refuse us the right to organise trade unions? ...

I am informed that a warrant for my arrest has been issued, and that the police are looking for me. ... Any serious politician will realise that under present-day conditions in this country, to seek for cheap martyrdom by handing myself to the police is naive and criminal. We have an important programme before us and it is important to carry it out very seriously and without delay.

I have chosen this latter course, which is more difficult and which entails more risk and hardship than sitting in gaol. I have had to separate myself from my dear wife and children, from my mother and sisters, to live as an outlaw in my own land. I have had to close my business, to abandon my profession, and live in poverty and misery, as many of my people are doing. ... I shall fight the government side by side with you, inch by inch, and mile by mile, until victory is won. What are you going to do? Will you come along with us, or are you going to cooperate with the government in its efforts to suppress the claims and aspirations of your own people? Or are you going to remain silent and neutral in a matter of life and death to my people, to our people? For my own part I have made my choice. I will not leave South Africa, nor will I surrender. Only through hardship, sacrifice and militant action can freedom be won. The struggle is my life. I will continue fighting for freedom until the end of my days.

"THE STRUGGLE IS MY LIFE," PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED WHILE UNDERGROUND IN SOUTH AFRICA, 26 JUNE 1961

“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society.... It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

In its proper meaning equality before the law means the right to participate in the making of the laws by which one is governed, a constitution which guarantees democratic rights to all sections of the population, the right to approach the court for protection or relief in the case of the violation of rights guaranteed in the constitution, and the right to take part in the administration of justice as judges, magistrates, attorneys-general, law advisers and similar positions.

In the absence of these safeguards the phrase “equality before the law”, in so far as it is intended to apply to us, is meaningless and misleading. All the rights and privileges to which I have referred are monopolized by whites, and we enjoy none of them. ...

... (I) consider myself neither morally nor legally obliged to obey laws made by a parliament in which I am not represented. That the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government is a principle universally acknowledged as sacred throughout the civilised world, and constitutes the basic foundations of freedom and

justice. It is understandable why citizens, who have the vote as well as the right to direct representation in the country's governing bodies, should be morally and legally bound by the laws governing the country.

It should be equally understandable why we, as Africans, should adopt the attitude that we are neither morally nor legally bound to obey laws which we have not made, nor can we be expected to have confidence in courts which enforce such laws. ...

I hate the practice of race discrimination, and in my hatred I am sustained by the fact that the overwhelming majority of mankind hate it equally. I hate the systematic inculcation of children with colour prejudice and I am sustained in that hatred by the fact that the overwhelming majority of mankind, here and abroad, are with me in that. I hate the racial arrogance which decrees that the good things of life shall be retained as the exclusive right of a minority of the population, and which reduces the majority of the population to a position of subservience and inferiority, and maintains them as voteless chattels to work where they are told and behave as they are told by the ruling minority. I am sustained in that hatred by the fact that the overwhelming majority of mankind both in this country and abroad are with me.

Nothing that this court can do to me will change in any way that hatred in me, which can only be removed by the removal of the injustice and the inhumanity which I have sought to remove from the political and social life of this country. ...

COURT STATEMENT, PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA, 15 OCTOBER–7 NOVEMBER 1962



Mourners at a funeral ceremony for those killed by South African police at Langa Township in Uitenhage | 21 March 1985, Cape Province, South Africa | UN Photo

The complaint of Africans ... is not only that they are poor and the whites are rich, but that the laws which are made by the whites are designed to preserve this situation. There are two ways to break out of poverty. The first is by formal education, and the second is by the worker acquiring a greater skill at his work and thus higher wages. As far as Africans are concerned, both these avenues of advancement are deliberately curtailed by legislation. ...

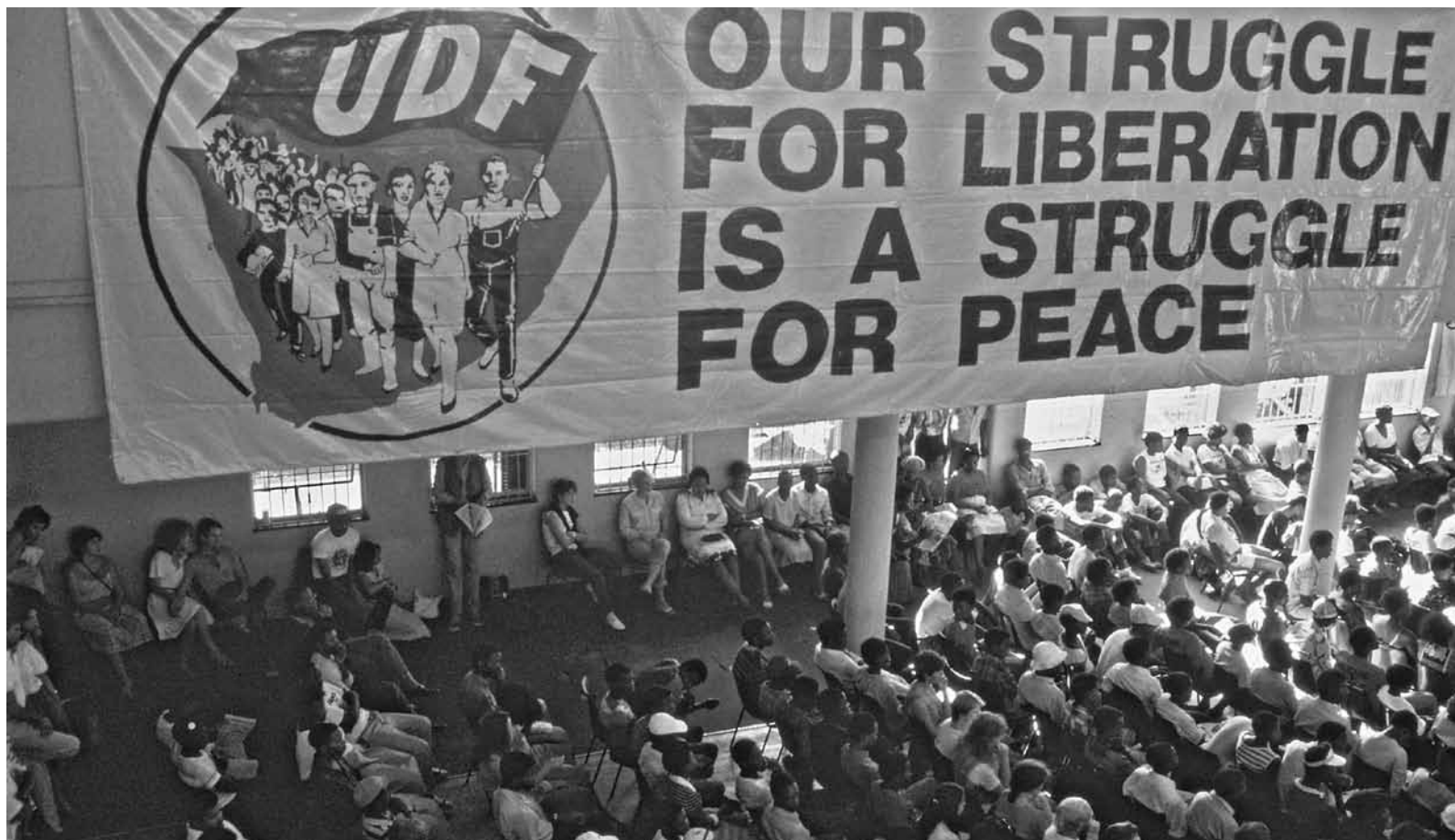
Above all, we want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities will be permanent. I know this sounds revolutionary to the whites in this country, because the majority of voters will be Africans. This makes the white man fear democracy.

But this fear cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all. It is not true that the enfranchisement of all will result in racial domination. Political division, based on colour, is entirely artificial and, when it disappears, so will the domination of one colour group by another. The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racialism. When it triumphs it will not change that policy.

This then is what the ANC is fighting. Their struggle is a truly national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by their own suffering and their own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live.

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

STATEMENT FROM THE DOCK AT THE OPENING OF THE DEFENSE CASE IN THE RIVONIA TRIAL, PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA, 20 APRIL 1964



Protest meeting of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in Johannesburg | 1 March 1985, Johannesburg, South Africa | UN Photo

Our struggle has reached a decisive moment. We call on our people to seize this moment so that the process towards democracy is rapid and uninterrupted. We have waited too long for our freedom. We can no longer wait. Now is the time to intensify the struggle on all fronts. To relax our efforts now would be a mistake which generations to come will not be able to forgive. The sight of freedom looming on the horizon should encourage us to redouble our efforts.

It is only through disciplined mass action that our victory can be assured. We call on our white compatriots to join us in the shaping of a new South Africa. The freedom movement is a political home for you too. We call on the international community to continue the campaign to isolate the apartheid regime. To lift sanctions now would be to run the risk of aborting the process towards the complete eradication of apartheid.

Our march to freedom is irreversible. We must not allow fear to stand in our way. Universal suffrage on a common voters' role in a united democratic and non-racial South Africa is the only way to peace and racial harmony...

ON RELEASE FROM PRISON, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, 11 FEBRUARY 1990

“We have waited too long
for our freedom.”



Jubilant crowds listen to the speech of President Nelson Mandela at his inauguration as South Africa's first black president | 10 May 1994, Pretoria, South Africa | UN Photo / Chris Sattlberger

ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

“I consider myself neither morally nor legally obliged to obey laws made by a parliament in which I am not represented.”



It will forever remain an indelible blight on human history that the apartheid crime ever occurred. Future generations will surely ask: What error was made that this system established itself in the wake of the adoption of a universal declaration of human rights? It will forever remain an accusation and a challenge to all men and women of conscience that it took as long as it has before all of us stood up to say 'enough is enough.'...

Let us travel it together. Let us, by our joint actions, vindicate the purposes for which this Organization was established and create a situation wherein its Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will become part of the body of law on which will be based the political and social order of a new South Africa. Our common victory is assured.

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID, NEW YORK, USA, 22 JUNE 1990

“All of us know how stubbornly racism can cling to the mind and how deeply it can infect the human soul.”

It surely must be one of the great ironies of our age that this august Assembly is addressed, for the first time in its 49 years, by a South African Head of State drawn from among the African majority of what is an African country.

Future generations will find it strange in the extreme that it was only so late in the 20th century that it was possible for our delegation to take its seat in the Assembly, recognized both by our people and the nations of the world as the legitimate representative of the people of our country.

It is indeed a most welcome thing that this august Organization will mark its 50th anniversary next year with the apartheid system having been vanquished and consigned to the past. That historic change has come about not least because of the great efforts in which the UN engaged to ensure the suppression of the apartheid crime against humanity. ...

In all we do, we have to ensure the healing of the wounds inflicted on all our people across the great dividing line imposed on our society by centuries of colonialism and apartheid. We must ensure that colour, race and gender become only a God-given gift to each one of us and not an indelible mark or attribute that accords a special status to any.

We must work for the day when we, as South Africans, see one another and interact with one another as equal human beings and as part of one nation united, rather than torn asunder, by its diversity. The road we shall have to travel to reach this destination will by no means be easy. All of us know how stubbornly racism can cling to the mind and how deeply it can infect the human soul. Where it is sustained by the racial ordering of the material world, as is the case in our country, that stubbornness can multiply a hundred-fold.

And yet however hard the battle will be, we will not surrender. Whatever the time it will take, we will not tire. The very fact that racism degrades both the perpetrator and the victim commands that, if we are true to our commitment to protect human dignity, we fight on until victory is achieved.

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, USA, 3 OCTOBER 1994

ON RECONCILIATION

“Reconciliation and nation-building would remain pious words if they were not premised on a concerted effort to remove the real roots of past conflict and injustice.”



We in South Africa are convinced that it is both possible and practicable to reach our goal of a better life for all in the shortest possible time. We derive our confidence from the knowledge that this is a vision shared by the overwhelming majority of South Africans across the colour and political divides.

And we fully appreciate the role of the international community in making this happen — not only in the form of material support. If we are able today to speak proudly of a rainbow nation, united in its diversity of culture, religion, race, language and ethnicity, it is in part because the world set us a moral example which we dared to follow.

This achievement is bound to last because it is founded on the realisation that reconciliation and nation-building mean, among other things, that we should set out to know the truth about the terrible past and ensure it does not recur. Ours must therefore not be merely a respite before the bitterness of the past once more reasserts itself.

We recognise too, that reconciliation and nation-building would remain pious words if they were not premised on a concerted effort to remove the real roots of past conflict and injustice. Our national security and the survival of our young democracy depend, above everything else, on the programme to meet the basic needs of the people. Reconstruction and development will ensure that all South Africans have a stake in life; that they share an interest in the well-being of the country as a whole.

RAJIV GANDHI FOUNDATION LECTURE, NEW DELHI, INDIA, 25 JANUARY 1995

Many people have been sceptical of our capacity to realise the ideal of a rainbow nation. It is true that South Africa was often brought to the brink of destruction because of differences. But let us re-affirm this one thing here today: it is not our diversity which divides us, it is not our ethnicity, or religion or culture that divides us. Since we have achieved our freedom, there can only be one division amongst us: between those who cherish democracy and those who do not!

As freedom loving people, we want to see our country prosper and provide basic services to all. For our freedom can never be complete or our democracy stable unless the basic needs of our people are met. We have seen the stability that development brings. And in turn we know that peace is the most powerful weapon that any community or nation can have for development.

As we rebuild our country, we should remain vigilant against the enemies of development and democracy, even if they come from within our own ranks. Violence will not bring us closer to our objectives. All of us should ask ourselves the question: Have I done everything in my power to bring about lasting peace and prosperity in my city and my country? ...

SPEECH ON RECEIVING THE FREEDOM OF DURBAN, DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, 16 APRIL 1999

ON HUMAN RIGHTS

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as the vindication of the justice of our cause.”



Nelson Mandela, President of the African National Congress (ANC), addresses the Security Council | 15 July 1992, United Nations, New York, USA | UN Photo / Milton Grant

Quite appropriately, this 53rd General Assembly [of the United Nations] will be remembered through the ages as the moment at which we marked and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Born in the aftermath of the defeat of the Nazi and fascist crime against humanity, this Declaration held high the hope that all our societies would, in future, be built on the foundations of the glorious vision spelt out in each of its clauses.

“Human beings who are the subject of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continue to be afflicted by wars and violent conflicts.”

For those who had to fight for their emancipation, such as ourselves who, with your help, had to free ourselves from the criminal apartheid system, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as the vindication of the justice of our cause. At the same time, it constituted a challenge to us that our freedom, once achieved, should be dedicated to the implementation of the perspectives contained in the Declaration.

Today, we celebrate the fact that this historic document has survived a turbulent five decades, which have seen some of the most extraordinary developments in the evolution of human society. These include the collapse of the colonial system, the passing of a bipolar world, breath-taking advances in science and technology and the entrenchment of the complex process of globalisation.

And yet, at the end of it all, the human beings who are the subject of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continue to be afflicted by wars and violent conflicts. They have, as yet, not attained their freedom from fear of death that would be brought about by the use of weapons of mass destruction as well as conventional arms. ...

This is probably the last time I will have the honour to stand at this podium to address the General Assembly. Born as the First World War came to a close and departing from public life as the world marks half-a-century of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I have reached that part of the long walk when the opportunity is granted, as it should be to all men and women, to retire to some rest and tranquillity in the village of my birth.

As I sit in Qunu and grow as ancient as its hills, I will continue to entertain the hope that there has emerged a cadre of leaders in my own country and region, on my continent and in the world, which will not allow that any should be denied their freedom as we were; that any should be turned into refugees as we were; that any should be condemned to go hungry as we were; that any should be stripped of their human dignity as we were. ...

Were all these hopes to translate into a realisable dream and not a nightmare to torment the soul of the aged, then will I, indeed, have peace and tranquillity. Then would history and the billions throughout the world proclaim that it was right that we dreamt and that we toiled to give life to a workable dream.

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, USA, 21 SEPTEMBER 1998

ON BUILDING PEACE

Pace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste, or any other social markers of difference. Religion, ethnicity, language, social and cultural practices are elements which enrich human civilization, adding to the wealth of our diversity. Why should they be allowed to become a cause of division, and violence? We demean our common humanity by allowing that to happen. ...

ADDRESS TO THE GLOBAL CONVENTION ON PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE, NEW DELHI, INDIA, 31 JANUARY 2004

There is still too much discord, hatred, division, conflict and violence in our world here at the beginning of the 21st century. A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dreamt of. ... It is so easy to break down and destroy. The heroes are those who make peace and build. ...

ADDRESS TO THE SIXTH ANNUAL NELSON MANDELA LECTURE, SOWETO, SOUTH AFRICA, 12 JULY 2008



Former Head of State President F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela after Mr. Mandela's presidential inauguration | 10 May 1994, Pretoria, South Africa | Reuters / Juda Ngwenya

ON FIGHTING POVERTY

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.”



South Africans have shown a tremendous capacity to join hands when facing difficulty. The apartheid system eventually fell because of the unity of those who were denied their rights, and because all sectors of society recognised that they had more to gain from working together than from fighting each other. It is that same quality that has helped us, so quickly, to lay the foundations for a better life.

When apartheid ended we faced the difficult task of reconstructing our shattered society and providing the most basic of services for our people. We had to build schools and hospitals, to provide housing and jobs, to boost our economy, to protect our people's rights through our Constitution and our courts, to help South Africa deal with the division of its past and start the healing process, to deal with abuse and damage which engulfed most of our communities.

Essentially our task was to create the conditions in which every South African has the opportunity to create a better life for themselves. But government cannot meet these challenges by itself. It requires of us all to pull together, into a partnership, in order to bring about the necessary changes.

In order to achieve these goals, we also needed to transform government from a system serving minority interests to one that meets the needs of all South Africans. And all these things had to be done in a country where most people were denied experience of government or proper education and training. This is why we have placed a heavy emphasis on building capacity in government. ...

“As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.”

When we say that the best solutions to these challenges can only be found when we work with each other, it requires a commitment of each and every one of us. Today we should all ask ourselves: What have I done to improve the surroundings in which I live? Do I litter or do I protect my surroundings? Do I spread racial hatred or do I promote peace and reconciliation? Do I buy stolen goods or do I help reduce crime? Do I pay my dues or do I cheat on my taxes, service fees and licences? Do I expect everything to be delivered to me or do I work with my local councillors to create a better life for myself and my community?

ADDRESS DURING MASKAKHANE FOCUS WEEK, BOTHAVILLE, SOUTH AFRICA, 14 OCTOBER 1998



As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest. We shall never forget how millions of people around the world joined us in solidarity to fight the injustice of our oppression while we were incarcerated. Those efforts paid off and we are able to stand here and join the millions around the world in support of freedom against poverty.

Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times — times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation.

We live in a world where knowledge and information have made enormous strides, yet millions of children are not in school. We live in a world where the AIDS pandemic threatens the very fabric of our lives. Yet we spend more money on weapons than on ensuring treatment and support for the millions infected by HIV. It is a world of great promise and hope. It is also a world of despair, disease and hunger.

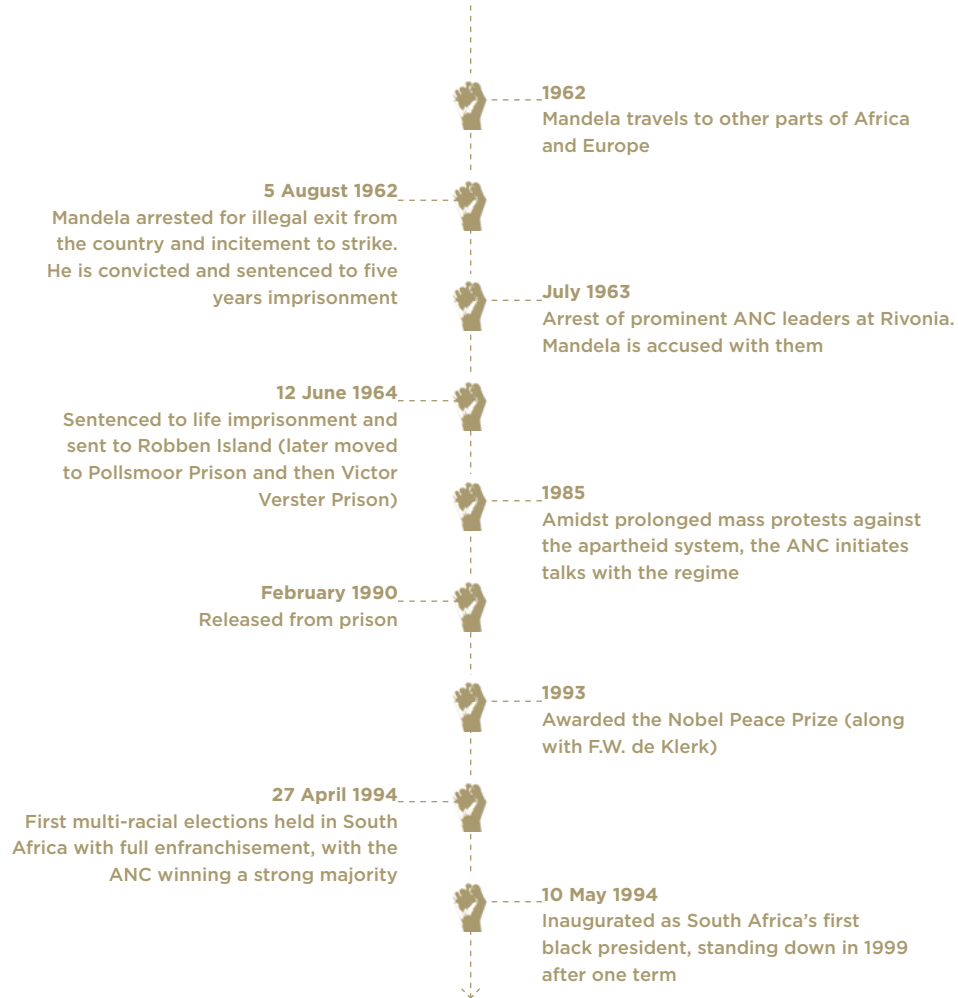
Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom. The steps that are needed from the developed nations are clear.

The first is ensuring trade justice. I have said before that trade justice is a truly meaningful way for the developed countries to show commitment to bringing about an end to global poverty. The second is an end to the debt crisis for the poor countries. The third is to deliver much more aid and make sure it is of the highest quality. ...

LIVE 8 CONCERT, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, 2 JULY 2005







18 JULY
NELSON MANDELA
INTERNATIONAL DAY

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