

18 July 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the Informal Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in
observance of Nelson Mandela International Day**

Excellences, Deputy Secretary-General Mr. Jan Eliasson; UN Messenger of Peace Mr. Steve Wonder, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to warmly welcome you to this informal meeting of the General Assembly to observe the annual Nelson Mandela International Day.

It is my pleasure to extend a special welcome to Mr. Stevie Wonder, Singer and UN Messenger of Peace.

Ladies and gentlemen, Nelson Mandela was born on 18 July 1918.

Since 2009, that day has been declared Nelson Mandela International Day and every year, on or around 18 July, the UN General Assembly gets together to celebrate and promote the values and extraordinary vision of one of the greatest men in modern history.

And if ever there was ever a time for us to bear those values and that vision in mind, it is today.

Right now, people across the world are reeling from recent terrorist attacks and conflict.

Migrants and refugees have been lost in countless tragedies on land and at sea; and continue to face incredible hardship.

Poverty and inequality continue to deny people of their basic rights.

Catastrophic climate change is threatening the futures of all people, but especially the most vulnerable.

And intolerance, discrimination and populism are threatening the very values that Madiba fought so hard to advance.

President Mandela's contribution to humanity extends across the three pillars of the UN and both the Nelson Mandela Prize and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners – also known as Nelson Mandela Rules – are a testament to his global impact.

But an even greater testament to Mandela's influence, would be for all world leaders to follow his example.

Indeed, Nelson Mandela International Day calls on all of us to take action and inspire change around the world for freedom, justice, democracy, and human rights.

For my part, in my letter dated 15 June, I encouraged delegates to spend at least 67 minutes doing something good for their community, to honour the remarkable 67 years that President Mandela dedicated to public service.

And last Monday, I extended that call to citizens across the world.

I gathered my office for a family photo with everyone wearing a T-shirt with Mandela's picture which is being shared in social media to inspire young people to take good actions.

Excellencies, with international human rights covenants for almost 50 years now, the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda, recent reviews on peace and security and greater transparency and inclusivity, the General Assembly is doing its part to follow President Mandela's example.

As he did, step by step, with courage and determination, together we can write a new chapter of history by dedicating our time and talent to improving the lives of billions people everywhere.

The Great Madiba requires nothing from you, but to promote his long vision of freedom and equality for all every day.

So, I encourage all of you to take action and inspire change!

Thank you.