

## TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA



## HERO OF HEROES

By Kgolone Phala

**W**e join the people of South Africa and the world who have received with heavy hearts the sad news of the passing on of former President Nelson Mandela, a hero of heroes, an outstanding freedom fighter, a giant colossus and an extraordinary nation-builder, reconciler and patriot. President Nelson Mandela served the nation as a freedom fighter, ANC President and as President of the country. We dip our banners in tribute and honour to the everlasting memory of this warriors' warrior, leaders' leader and giant of giants. We wish his spirit to live long amongst us and to live in the hearts and minds of future generations forever more. No grave is big enough to swallow this African legend. His unmatched contribution to humanity,

his unequalled contribution to the freedom struggle and his outstanding contribution to the building of a non-racial, non-sexist, united, democratic and prosperous South Africa will never be forgotten.

The passing on of President Nelson Mandela represents the closing of an era of giant, heroic and committed freedom fighters. Already gone before, we can count many, many of his revolutionary generation - Oliver Tambo, Inkosi Albert Luthuli, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Yusuf Dadoo, Elias Motswaledi, Wilton Mkwayi, Moses Kotane, JB Marks, Duma Nokwe, Moses Mabhida, Bertha Gxowa, Henry Makgothi, Joe Modise, Alfred Nzo, Ruth First, Billy Nair, Joe Slovo, Chris Hani, Brian Bunting,

Ray Alexander, Jack Simons, Flag Boshielo, Mark Shope, Albertina Sisulu, John Phala, Harry Gwala and many others.

At the funeral of his great friend Walter Sisulu in May 2003 Madiba said, "In the last few years we have walked this road with greater frequency, marching in the procession to bid farewell to the veterans of our movement, paying our last respect to the fallen spears of the nation from a generation now reaching the end of a long and heroic struggle. Those of us from that generation who are singled out to stay the longest have to bear the pain of seeing our comrades go. Their going must leave an emptiness with those of us who stay behind. Our sadness over them is tempered by the comforting knowledge that, the

separation will not be interminably long."

It is this generation that planted deep in the soil the roots of building a giant people's movement out of the ANC in the 1940s and '50s based on the principles of solidarity, volunteerism, unity, selflessness, honesty, discipline, loyalty, hard-work, truthfulness, sacrifice, humility, respect, reputation, magnanimity, integrity, generosity and courage. They lived by these principles throughout their lives. Madiba was himself an embodiment of them all.

Madiba suffered arrest, detention, torture, banning and imprisonment, but as a mature man he bore no grudges and had no anger towards the people who perpetuated the fascist white minority regime for decades and perpetrated apartheid, oppression, exploitation, segregation, suppression, repression and genocide in South Africa. He saw the demonic side of the apartheid system, experienced the trigger-happy and bloodthirsty terrorism of the nightmarish white-minority rule. He worked tirelessly towards reconciliation, national unity, new patriotism and peace.

It is for this time-tested work that Nelson Mandela is known throughout the world as a giant of giants. That is why he has a town, streets, avenues, parks, squares, buildings, wards, branches, clinics, a region, a hospital, a municipality and a university named after him. Even more spectacularly many more things have acquired his name including racehorses, a sea slug (*Mandelia micocomata*), two spiders (*Singafrotypa Mandela* and *nelisimus nelson*), a nuclear particle, a tree (in Colombia), an orchid (in Singapore), a rose (*Madiba*), and a woodpecker (*Australopicus Nelsoni Mandelai*). He has also had bestowed on him all categories of honours, awards, medals, ranks, degrees, diplomas, decorations and other forms of recognitions from all over the world.

As Madiba said about himself on the occasion of his farewell speech in closing the 50th National Conference of the ANC in Mafikeng, 1997, "Comrades and friends, more often than not, an epoch creates and nurtures the individuals which are associated with its twists and turns and so a name

becomes a symbol of an era. As we hand over the baton, it is appropriate that I should thank the ANC for shaping me as a symbol of what it stands for. I know that the love and respect that I have enjoyed is the love and respect for the ANC and its ideas. I know that the world-wide appreciation of South Africa's miracle and the dignity of its people is appreciation, first and foremost, of the work of the ANC."

Nelson Mandela joins the ranks of the giants that once trod the earth - such as Mahatma Gandhi, Julius Nyerere, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jomo Kenyatta, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Chief Albert Luthuli, Kwame Nkumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Marx and Engels. The angels in heaven must be singing Hosana! Halleluya! and dancing on the arrival of this great man, a messenger of goodwill, a peace negotiator, a nation-builder and a reconciler.

President Nelson Mandela, allow us to talk to you directly: We will always be reminded of your poetic and prophetic words at the Rivonia Trial in 1964 that, "during my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people, inspired by their own suffering and experience. 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." You laid the firm and unshakeable foundations of such a society in 1994. We are busy building on that foundation to create a better life for all.

We will fight to ensure as you said about the 1994 major democratic breakthrough that, "never, never and never again should the sun set on so glorious a human achievement." In your memory and as a tribute to you, we will do all in our power and strength to ensure that a democratic South Africa you fought for and established is sustained, advanced and prospers. We vow not to take for granted the democracy, freedom, peace and equality we enjoy today which you

fought for so much for your entire adult life.

You have just ended your long walk but you have left us to continue with the long long journey. We hope and wish that you will guide us all the way. And that you will be our sun in the day, and our moon and stars in the night. With you we will not be lost. You are an icon of our time, you are a legend of all times. Your birthdays will always remind us to dedicate ourselves and our lives to the service of the people. You have shown the world outstanding magnanimity. You were singled out by history to be bequeathed with the unmatched responsibility to symbolise humanity's search for equality and justice.

We say: Hamba kahle Isithwalandwe-Seaparankwe, you the wearer of feathers of a very rare bird given to African warriors who have distinguished themselves in battle.

We sing with the entire nation and the World together.

*Nkosi sikelel iAfrika, maluphakanyisw' iphondo lwayo, Yizwa imithandazo yethu Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo. Morena boloka setshaba sageshu o fedishe dintwa le matshwenyego. O se boloke setshaba sa, South Africa! Uit die blou van onse hemel, uit die diepte van ons see. Oor ons ewige gebertes, waar die kranse antwoord gee. Sounds the call to come together, and united we shall stand, let us live and strive for freedom, in South Africa our land!*

We hope, wish and pray that like the old religious singer promised, we say, "Shala botse, mme re fiwe go bonana gape Moreneng" (goodbye with a hope that we are given a chance to meet again in the Lord.)

Etela hi ku rhula, nhena ya tinhena!!

Kha vha edele nga mulalo muhali wa vhahali!!

Mokgapa o mogolo o wele, dithaga rella boshogoshogo!!

Ah Dalibhunga!!

Mativha o xa! Xunu!!

We pay due tribute to your undying memory!!

Rest in peace son of the soil!!! Hamba kahle, dear father, dear leader!!

Robala ka khutso senatla sa dinatla!!

May the spirit of President Nelson Mandela live long!! ■