

Sunday Times

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## Let us make this World Cup a tribute to the wisdom of Madiba

**O**n a February day in 1990 about 100 000 people gathered at King's Park stadium in Durban to see and hear a recently released Nelson Mandela. The man had been out of prison for a few weeks and was making his way around the country (and the world) being welcomed back to sunny skies and freedom.

It was a moment for which the world had waited. To see this human who was beyond humanity. To pay tribute to this man who had spent almost 27 years in prison for his beliefs — and came out singing hymns of forgiveness and reconciliation. Was he for real, they wondered. If he was, they wanted to partake of his nourishing words of wisdom. And bask in the cooling shadow of his gigantic presence.

Even in his very didactic speaking style, every sentence shimmered with poetic wisdom.

The masses clapped. They cheered. They whistled. They sang. Some even shed a tear or two.

Until he said: "Take your knives, and your guns, and your pangas and throw them into the sea."

A hush fell over the stadium.

These were people who had been subjected to intolerable violence by Inkatha, a surrogate of the apartheid regime, an organisation that had killed and maimed thousands. An organisation that, like a ferocious blizzard, had swept the province of KwaZulu-Natal, razing thousands of homesteads and houses.

Mandela's exhortation seemed to rub salt into the still fresh wounds. How could they forgive Inkatha and the cantankerous chief at its helm? Some



MONDLI  
MAKHANYA

**Over the next six weeks we can show our gratitude by putting on a stunning show**

booed Mandela, others suffered in silence, suppressed their anger and slowly drifted away from the stadium, heads bowed in disappointment.

A few months later Inkatha, in conjunction with the apartheid security forces, launched a new onslaught. In what history has recorded as the Seven-Day War, residents of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands fought pitched battles. Thousands died. The flames of violence raged with renewed vigour.

The onslaught prompted extremists to issue a pamphlet countering Mandela's message. The pamphlet read: "Comrades, go back to the sea. Fetch your weapons, your knives, your pangas and return to the battlefield!"

Even in a province that had become used to violence, this was a chilling message.

But, despite this, Mandela remained resolute. The war had to end. He was prepared to go to extremes to build a bridge between the followers of his own organisation, and those of Inkatha. To the anger of ANC hardliners like Harry Gwala, Mandela even supped with the cantankerous chief from Ulundi. The war had to end.

Numerous peace meetings were held at his behest. Hardliners from both sides of the political divide tried their damndest to scupper these efforts. But Mandela was resolute. The war had to end.

As the years marched on, it became clear that the country's first, all-inclusive elections were inevitable. The Afrikaner right wing tried to sabotage this inevitability with bombs, assassinations and indiscriminate shootings. The military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress launched random attacks on pubs, churches and any institutions where whites were gathered.

But the steady hand of Nelson Mandela remained on the wheel. The war had to end.

His tenacity finally bore fruit and we stood witness to the miracle that was April 27 1994. But the aftermath of that miracle was no bed of roses. Madiba soldiered on to ensure that the bridges fashioned in 1994 remained intact.

As a journalist I witnessed his greatness up close. He took unpopular decisions and on many occasions angered both friend and foe.

He famously made a trek to Orania and had tea and koeksisters with Betsie Verwoerd, the wife of the late

architect of apartheid. Many believed he was taking appeasement too far.

He took on the trade unions and the communists and insisted that the Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy was the correct route for South Africa if we were going to play in the big leagues of the world.

On foreign soil he mingled with the George Bushes and Helmut Kohls as easily as he did with Muammar Gaddafi and Fidel Castro.

His wisdom and endurance gave us the country that is today hosting the 2010 World Cup. Nelson Mandela is now an old man. God willing, he will still be with us for some time yet. We should be grateful that he lived long enough to enjoy the fruits of his wisdom.

Over the next six weeks we will have the chance to show our gratitude to him by putting on a stunning show. We must display his greatness to the world.

Even if the nasty among us try to spoil the party, the other 48 million of us (plus the 5 million Zimbabweans among us) will make sure that they are put in their place.

Through the successful execution of this tournament, we and the rest of the world will be paying tribute to a man who enables humanity to believe that it is possible to dream bigger and aspire to perfection.

Humanity will be saying to him that his 90-something years were worth living. That the 27 years he spent in prison were worthwhile. Siyabonga Madiba! South Africa, Ke nako!