

John Mander

Homage to Nelson Mandela



12/11/036/0030/04

Homage to Nelson Mandela

ICA — Indian Council for Cultural Relations
in collaboration with
African National Congress of South Africa
(Asian Mission, New Delhi)

PREFATORY NOTE

IT IS A FACT well known to people, all over the world, who cherish the noble cause of freedom, that for many long years now, workers of the African National Congress of South Africa have led a united front of anti-racist and democratic forces against the reprehensible and unjust policies of apartheid and the repressive path followed by the racist regime in Pretoria. For these brave people the difficult journey to freedom is not yet completed. Their struggle continues, their campaign for liberty is being waged bravely. Their commitment to the cause of liberty is unequivocally sincere.

Nelson Mandela, who has been in the vanguard of the struggle that is going on in South Africa is one of these courageous leaders providing inspiration and hope for the struggle in exceptionally difficult conditions.

The Pretoria regime has reacted to the liberation struggle in South Africa in a manner that is typical of all authoritarian governments which have nothing to defend

but their own bankrupt system of institutionalised injustice. This has, however, not weakened the true nationalist spirit of South African freedom-fighters. The noble and idealistic trail that Nelson Mandela has blazed across the pages of the evolving history of the South African nation has inspired all participants in the freedom struggle in the African continent.

Mandela's words spoken at the Rivonia trial in 1963 are as relevant today as they were then. He said then that the struggle of the African people was a struggle for the right to live, a struggle for justice, for "security and a stake in society"; it was also a struggle to achieve the "ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.

This struggle goes on in South Africa. The African people have always had and will continue to have India's unflinching support in this struggle. It is our fervent hope that the peoples of Africa will achieve their goals soon and that inspiring and courageous leaders like Mandela can see South Africa truly emancipated in their life-time. Robben Island has not imprisoned Mandela's spirit and his just defiance; all those who wish to see justice and freedom established in South Africa draw strength from Mandela's life and works. May freedom come to Nelson Mandela and all his brave brethren soon.

TRIBUTE ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 60TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

One of South Africa's outstanding patriots and illustrious leaders, Nelson Mandela, a member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress of South Africa and Head of its military wing — Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) together with his Comrades, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Dennis Goldberg, Ahmed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi and Andrew Mlangeni was sentenced to life imprisonment during the famous Rivonia Trial of July 1964.

The apartheid court imposed this savage sentence on him and his colleagues for their active participation and leadership in the underground machinery of the African National Congress.

The accused Number One in this trial, Mandela was already serving a 5 year term of imprisonment for organising a 3 day national strike in May 1961 and for leaving the country without a valid travel document.

This great revolutionary together with his comrades is still languishing in Vorster's notorious maximum security prison on Robben Island, Cape Town.

The conditions under which Mandela is being imprisoned are appalling and revolting. He has to carry out hard and rigorous labour for the rest of his life in terms of the sentence imposed on him.

It is now 16 years since he was incarcerated and July 18 of this year marked his 60th birthday. On this special day in his life we resolve to work vigorously for the just cause that we all serve. And we wish him a long, long life.

Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918 in the Transkei, South Africa.

He is married and has two children. His wife Winnie is an active opponent like her husband against the apartheid regime. Since 1963 she has been placed under various restrictive orders which included house arrest. She was also repeatedly arrested on charges of infringement of banning orders and she was held incommunicado, in detention for long periods during 1969-1970 under the hated Terrorism Act and brutally ill-treated.

Two years ago Vorster regime banished Winnie to Brandfort, a remote town in the Orange Free State.

Mandela studied at Fort Hare College and obtained his bachelor's degree in arts and practised as an attorney for a number of

years together with Comrade O. R. Tambo (President of the ANC) his life long friend and comrade.

His political activities started in the ANC Youth League which was formed in 1943. He played an active role in it and was its leader for several years before joining the ANC.

He took part and gave leadership in such campaigns as June 26, 1950 Protest Day Strike, the Defiance Campaign against Unjust Laws and the Pass Burning Campaign following the Sharpeville Massacre and the 3 day National Strike in May 1961.

The ANC and its allies organised the Congress of the People attended by more than 3000 delegates from all walks of life embracing Africans, Whites, Coloureds and Indians adopted the Freedom Charter—a revolutionary programme for a future South Africa. In the preparation for this august assembly Mandela played a leading role and was one of the architects of the Charter.

In the year 1956 he was among the 156 Congress leaders who were charged with high treason. This trial lasted for 5 years and he along with all the accused was acquitted.

In the early 60's he closed his legal practice and joined the underground movement.

Amidst these rich and varied political activities Mandela was arrested on several

occasions and hauled before racist courts. He always made effective use of the reactionary courts to challenge the inhuman and evil system of apartheid and colonial domination.

It is our privilege and honour to quote extracts of his statement made during Rivonia Trial:

“I am the First Accused.

“I hold a Bachelor’s Degree in Arts and practised as an attorney in Johannesburg for a number of years in partnership with Oliver Tambo. I am a convicted prisoner serving five years for leaving the country without a permit and for inciting people to go on strike at the end of May 1961.

“At the outset, I want to say that the suggestion made by the State in its opening address that the struggle in South Africa is under the influence of foreigners or communists is wholly incorrect. I have done whatever I did, both as an individual and as a leader of my people, because of my experience in South Africa and my own proudly felt African background, and not because of what any outsider might have said.

“Firstly, we believed that as a result of Government policy, violence by the African people had become inevitable, and that unless responsible leadership was given to canalise and control the feelings of our people, there would be outbreaks of terrorism which would produce an intensity of bitterness and hostility between the

various races of this country which is not produced even by war. Secondly, we felt without violence there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle White supremacy. All lawful modes of expressing opposition to this principle had been closed by legislation, and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority, or to defy the Government. We chose to defy the law.

“The African National Congress was formed in 1912 to defend the rights of the African people which had been seriously curtailed by the South African Act, and which were then being threatened by the Native Land Act. For thirty seven years—that is until 1949—it adhered strictly to a constitutional struggle. It put forward demands and resolutions; it sent delegations to the Government in the belief that African grievances could be settled through peaceful discussion and that Africans could advance gradually to full political rights. But White Governments remained unmoved, and the rights of Africans became less instead of becoming greater. In the words of my leader, Chief Lutuli, who became President of the ANC in 1952, and who was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize : ‘who will deny that thirty years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly at a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of moderation? The past thirty years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and

progress, until today we have reached a stage where we have almost no rights at all'.

"In 1960 there was shooting at Sharpeville, which resulted in the proclamation of a state of emergency and the declaration of the ANC as an unlawful organisation. My colleagues and I, after careful consideration, decided that we would not obey this decree. The African people were not part of the Government and did not make the laws by which they were governed. We believed in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that 'the will of the people shall be the basis of authority of the Government', and for us to accept the banning was equivalent to accepting the silencing of the African for all time. The ANC refused to dissolve, but instead went underground. We believed it was our duty to preserve this organisation which had been built up with almost fifty years of unremitting toil. I have no doubt that no self-respecting White political organisation would disband itself if declared illegal by a government in which it had no say.

"The lack of human dignity experienced by Africans is the direct result of the policy of White supremacy. White supremacy implies Black inferiority. Legislation designed to preserve White supremacy entrenches this notion. Menial tasks in South Africa are invariably performed by Africans.

"Pass laws, which to the Africans are amongst the most hated bits of legislation in South Africa render any African liable to police surveillance at any time. I doubt whether

there is a single African male in South Africa who has not at some stage had a brush with the police over his pass. Hundreds and thousands of Africans are thrown into jail each year under the pass laws. Even worse than this is the fact that pass laws keep husband and wife apart and lead to the breakdown of family life.

“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 life time 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 idea' 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."

We wish to call upon the International Community to mount a vigorous campaign for the release of Mandela and all political prisoners and detainees in South Africa.

We pay our warmest tributes to this gallant revolutionary for his dynamic leadership, dedication and unwavering committal in the struggle for the total liberation of South Africa.

AMANDLA-MAATLA !

14th July 1978

Homage to Nelson Mandela

