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UN marks Nelson Mandela International Day with public service activities



Volunteers work at New York's Central Park to mark the second annual Nelson Mandela International Day

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The United Nations today marked the second annual Nelson Mandela International Day with a series of events dedicated to public service, as well as speeches, exhibitions and film screenings in recognition of the former South African president's contributions as a human rights defender, freedom fighter and peacemaker.

In New York, diplomats and UN staff gathered in Central Park to paint benches as part of the “Take Action! Inspire Change” campaign by the Mandela Foundation, which has exhorted people across the world to pledge “67 minutes of service” today in recognition of Mr. Mandela’s 67 years of selfless public service.

An exhibition where visitors can learn about Mr. Mandela through a range of video and audio materials also opened at UN Headquarters.

In Sudan’s troubled region of Darfur, the UN-African Union peacekeeping force ([UNAMID](#)) organized an event in a local girls’ school in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, where soldiers in the mission delivered school materials, planted trees, repainted walls and sang.

The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus ([UNFICYP](#)) and the country’s Association for Historical Dialogue and Research marked the Day with the screening of the 2009 movie *Invictus*, which tells the story of South Africa during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, which it hosted the year after Mr. Mandela became the country’s president.

Anti-apartheid activist Gay McDougall, who is now the UN Independent Expert for Minorities, was with Mr. Mandela when he voted for the first time in his life in 1994.

“I think it [Nelson Mandela International Day] is an annual opportunity for people to celebrate – to remind themselves to celebrate and recommit themselves to the kind of principled dedication to equality that Nelson Mandela represents for all of us,” she told UN Radio.

David Dinkins, the former mayor of New York, who facilitated Mr. Mandela’s first official visit to the United States in 1990, said the most interesting thing about the South Africa was “his total absence of bitterness. One can only imagine what he has been through, what he has witnessed, and yet he is as gentle as can be, which is not to be mistaken for any softness.”

“Because of what Nelson Mandela has done I maintain it demonstrates that one day there will be peace in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland,” he told UN Radio.

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