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On International Day, UN honours Nelson Mandela's work for peace, justice, equality



18 July is Nelson Mandela International Day. Photo: Nelson Mandela Foundation

18 July 2012 –

The United Nations today marked Nelson Mandela International Day, celebrating the South African leader's 94th birthday and honouring his contributions to democracy, racial justice and reconciliation with events at its Headquarters in New York and around the world.

Every year on 18 July, individuals around the world are encouraged to devote 67 minutes to helping others – by volunteering in a hospital, tutoring a child, providing food for the homeless, or any other community service.

The 67-minute campaign – ‘Take Action – Inspire Change’ – is based on people devoting one minute of their time for every year that Mr. Mandela devoted to public service, as a human rights lawyer, a prisoner of conscience, an international peacemaker and the first democratically-elected President of post-apartheid South Africa.

“Nelson Mandela gave 67 years of his life to bring change to the people of South Africa. Our gift to him can – and must – be to change our world for the better,” [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) said in his [message](#) for the Day.

“Take action; inspire change; make every day a Mandela Day,” he added.

The General Assembly is marking the Day with an event entitled ‘Building a Caring World – Nelson Mandela’s Vision,’ that includes remarks by senior officials, videos and a performance by two South African students of the University of Cape Town Opera School.

“President Mandela – ‘Madiba,’ as he is affectionately known – embodies the very culture of peace espoused by the United Nations,” noted Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser in his remarks to the gathering. “His legacy inspires the United Nations in its labours to improve social equality and justice, and to pursue peace through dialogue and non-violence.”

Mr. Al-Nasser added that Mr. Mandela’s persistence in cultivating national consensus and social cohesion resonates deeply with the Arab Awakening – the uprisings and popular protest movements that have engulfed North Africa and the Middle East since last year and led to the toppling of long-term regimes in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen.

Also in New York, the city’s Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, declared today as ‘Nelson Mandela International Day’ in the city of New York, in partnership with the UN Academic Impact (UNAI).

“Today, as ‘Madiba’ celebrates his 94th birthday, New Yorkers are proud to join the United Nations once again in honouring his tremendous moral courage and achievements. And we are doing so the best way we can – by giving back and, in our own communities, following the incomparable example Mandela set during his 67 years public service,” Mr. Bloomberg said in the proclamation.

The Mayor also referred to UNAI’s ‘7/18 for Mandela’ initiative, which builds on the fact that the telephone area code of a great part of New York City, including four of its five boroughs, is “718,” which also represents the US calendar rendering of 18 July.

Organized under the theme ‘Mandela – Marking a New Direction in Education, Learning and Achievement,’ the UNAI initiative focuses on the role of education as an empowering tool. UNAI is responsible for aligning higher education institutions with the United Nations in support of ten universally accepted principles in areas such as human rights, literacy and sustainability.

In addition, UN offices around the world, including in Accra, Bujumbura, Pretoria, Tehran and Yaoundé, are organizing outreach activities and events to mark Nelson Mandela International Day.

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