



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

**Mandela, Mr Rolihlahla
(Nelson) Dalibhunga, AC**

SPEECH

Wednesday, 11 December 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (10:56): I am pleased to make a contribution today in memory of the late Nelson Mandela. It was a long life that he lived—indeed, 95 years of it—but what a life it was and what a contribution Nelson Mandela made to not only his community but also the global community. Nelson Mandela, as has been said by other speakers here, is a man who led a struggle, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. It is a struggle that made him a global icon of resistance and sacrifice for the greater good. For Nelson Mandela that sacrifice was a personal one—one that saw him jailed for 27 years—but it was a sacrifice that he made for the greater good. That greater good was to free his countrymen and countrywomen from the inhuman oppression of apartheid. This was a struggle to free his people from the indignity and the oppression of the white-inspired apartheid regime.

In remembering Nelson Mandela we must, first and foremost, not forget what this struggle was. Apartheid, an Afrikaner word meaning separateness or apartness, was a policy of racial segregation devised by the minority white Afrikaners and seen by them as vital to the survival of their minority existence. It became official state policy in 1948 and its essence and purpose were to ensure the retention of a pure white race which sought to assert its domination in a country where some 73 per cent of the population were black South Africans. Its aim was to assist the separate development of the different groups and perpetuate white control and domination over non-white races, which were deemed to be at a less-developed stage of civilisation.

When Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited Australia in the early nineties as part of the anti-apartheid movement I attended a public lecture he gave at La Trobe University at that time. I remember Archbishop Tutu describing apartheid as an immoral, vicious and cruel Frankenstein's monster. At the time the white South African government was under immense internal and international pressure as the impact of the global anti-apartheid movement took hold, including trade union sanctions and supporting boycotts. It was all beginning to take its toll on the government.

So the white South African government tried to placate this international outrage by attempting to reform the system of apartheid. I recall Archbishop Tutu putting the question to the audience: 'How do you reform a Frankenstein?' His response was: 'You dismantle apartheid. You do not reform it.' Some of the reforms that the white South African government introduced at the time, in an attempt to get international outrage and pressure off their backs, included the legalisation of black trade unions, given that the trade union movement internationally was at the forefront of a lot of the trade sanctions and other pressures that were brought to bear. These reforms, Archbishop Tutu told us, were marred anyway by the continual harassment and detention of union leaders. Part of the reform also saw the abolition of the pass laws, which had made it a criminal offence for black South Africans to move within their homeland without a pass. They also abolished the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act, which had until then prohibited mixed marriages and made sexual relations between blacks and whites a criminal offence.

But these reforms were inadequate because, as Archbishop Tutu said, the fundamental laws of apartheid remained. The new constitution of South Africa of 1984, although meant to be a reforming one, further entrenched and perpetuated white minority rule by making no mention of the 73 per cent of the population other than in a small clause that said that all black affairs would be dealt with by the state president by decree.

Nelson Mandela's South Africa was a country with a majority black population who were denied basic and fundamental rights—human rights and rights to dignity and respect. In their own homeland, they were denied the inalienable right to freedom of expression and freedom of movement. They were denied the right to education and employment opportunities for themselves and their children. Effectively, they were denied the right to live and walk freely in their own homeland.

White minority propaganda constantly described black leaders—and this included Mandela—as evil, with destructive intentions. The African National Congress, and in particular the ANC organisation Spear of the

Nation, was seen as an enemy of the state. Police took free licence to shoot and kill at will. We are all familiar with scenes and reports of opening fire in crowds and killing children. All those who dared to resist were at risk. In an attempt to preserve its evil regime, the white South African government jailed people, from church leaders to children—children who were incarcerated without trial and put away in cells with hardened criminals.

The white regime actually gave rise to a struggle. Their actions gave rise to a struggle that they later characterised as evil, in order to justify their brutal response. Any regime that designs apartheid is itself not only a regime of evil but a regime of terror. This was the South Africa that Nelson Mandela struggled against. This was the South Africa that the world community joined his struggle against. In fact, Australia was—and many members before me have made reference to this fact—one of the countries at the forefront of this international struggle. My own party, the Australian Labor Party; the Australian trade union movements and trade unionists; and Australian sportspeople lent their support and activism to the anti-apartheid struggle.

In fact, from 1960 to about 1990, Australian unions organised and enforced trade and shipping boycotts alongside the official sanctions that were in place around the world against South Africa. They formed links with black African trade unions—particularly the peak organisation, COSATU—and helped establish and fund the ANC's office and representatives in Sydney.

The ACTU's overseas aid organisation, Union Aid Abroad, or APHEDA, as it is also known, was a leading agency in supporting the democratic movement, including providing assistance to the ANC during the apartheid years and later helping those in exile to return to South Africa during the transition to democracy.

When Nelson Mandela visited Australia in 1990, as the member for Grayndler so fondly spoke of a little while ago, he came here to thank us. He was released from Robben Island prison in 1990 and he came to Australia to thank us. I also had the privilege to see him and to hear him speak at the ACTU function hosted at the Melbourne Town Hall. I consider myself very fortunate to have seen and meet such a significant human being, one who, as President Obama said, 'now belongs to the ages'. Mandela thanked Australia. He was indeed a very humble man and he acknowledged that, without international community support, his cause may never have been realised.

During that time in 1990 he also thanked then Prime Minister Bob Hawke for maintaining economic and sporting sanctions against South Africa. Australia was active in the international push to have Mandela freed from jail. In fact, the push to dismantle apartheid and the push to free Nelson Mandela from jail became a defining world struggle. We in Australia joined in, as did other European countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, South African nations—basically all the nations of the world. In the words of then foreign minister Gareth Evans in March 1986, in response to a question on what progress had been made toward achieving the release of Nelson Mandela, Gareth Evans quoted from a letter he had written, which called for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and said:

On September 2nd last year the Australian Government called for the release of political prisoners, including the immediate release of Mandela as an essential step toward dialogue and negotiations leading to the end of apartheid and a transition to a united free and democratic South Africa.

Mandela's release was deemed essential to a breakthrough in the struggle against apartheid. We all remember the euphoria after his release, not only his personal euphoria but also the euphoria in his homeland and the euphoria around the world. With that came the challenge of uniting and healing a nation which had been torn apart by the struggle which had given rise to hatred and fear.

Mandela went on to become the first democratically elected black President in May 1994. At the time, the *Australian* said:

Mr Mandela's Presidential victory is the culmination of an odyssey that could easily have ended on the gallows in 1964 when he faced the death sentence for treason against the apartheid state. Instead he was sentenced to life in jail. Behind bars, he evolved into the world's most celebrated political prisoner and the standard bearer of the struggle for racial equality in the world's pariah nation, South Africa.

For those who proclaimed him a terrorist because of his support for armed struggle against the South African regime, or indeed as a communist, history has shown that he was a freedom fighter, a man who became the face of and indeed epitomised the struggle against apartheid. As President Obama described him yesterday at the memorial service, he was a giant because without him change may not have come to South Africa when it did or

how it did and, certainly, without him the reconciliation and healing which followed that change may not have happened. For every human struggle throughout our history, the burden of that struggle has usually fallen on an individual who became the reference point for everybody else. There were many individuals who shone in this human struggle against apartheid, but Nelson Mandela was the tallest of the tall, a man born in a small village of Transkei, stood up and moved the earth.

Madiba's message was always clear and focused. In his later years he liked to visit school children. In one of his visits to SAHETI, a Greek school in Johannesburg—which my chief of staff attended, as she is South African born and bred, now Australian—Nelson Mandela's speech to the children centred on the nursery rhyme *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. Madiba, as he is known to South Africans, had a message for the children: never give up. If you fail, you try and you try again until you shine like a star. One of his most famous quotes was:

Do not judge me by my successes; judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.

That, I think, in many ways epitomises the humility of the man that so many of our members here today have spoken about.

In closing, just to illustrate what he meant to the people of South Africa—here we are in the Australian parliament talking about him, as they work their way through the 10-day mourning period—in a televised address President Zuma said that the man known as Madiba brought South Africa together:

Our nation has lost its greatest son. Our people have lost a father.

... ..

This is the moment of our deepest sorrow.

Our nation has lost its greatest son.

Yet, what made Nelson Mandela great was precisely what made him human. We saw in him what we seek in ourselves.

And in him we saw so much of ourselves.

Thank you.