

Editorial: Happy Birthday, Tata

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NELSON Mandela turns 95 today. It is a milestone few would have dared to imagine when he was admitted to hospital 41 days ago. The past six weeks have been mournful, maudlin and even macabre at times as the country, and indeed the world, have prepared for a future in which one of the greatest leaders of all time will no longer be there.

Mandela has left us not only a legacy but also the tools with which to build on his vision as our first democratically elected president, a vision into which he continued to breathe life when he left office.

Today, as we celebrate his birthday, we are asked to spend 67 minutes of our time helping others.

The annual 67 Minutes for Madiba was launched in 2010, the year South Africa hosted the soccer World Cup. Since then it has caught the imagination of South Africans from all walks of life and has developed into an annual tribute to an extraordinary man.

There are, as we have detailed elsewhere, many ways to honour Mandela today. One very symbolic way would be to join the lunch time human chain stretching from Athlone to Rondebosch in one direction and from Athlone to Gugulethu in the other. The chain will, in the organisers' words, link areas and communities that were previously kept separate and apart and "make a very visible expression of commitment to upholding Madiba's dream of breaking down old divisions between communities".

In supporting the human chain, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba perhaps summed up the essence of the day in saying that "at the heart of all that Nelson Mandela has done for this country, was his dream of creating a new, united, democratic, non-racial South Africa. We must not lose sight of this vision – and there can be no better way to honour him and all he has done for us, on his birthday, than to commit ourselves afresh to making this the

foundation of our lives, the touch-stone of all our policies and actions, the lens through which we speak and act.”

As we celebrate Mandela’s birthday it is fitting to remember how much still divides us, and how much of the work he started is still to be done.

Beyond the acts of kindness which so many South Africans will perform today, it is in continuing this work – for justice, equality and human rights – that we can best pay tribute to him.

Happy birthday, Madiba!

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