

# Human chain links city communities

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**INLSA IN FINE SPIRITS:** The nation and world celebrated Nelson Mandela's 95th birthday yesterday. In Cape Town, thousands formed a Human Chain between Gugulethu and Rondebosch. (Top, from left): Birthday balloons flank Mandela's statue outside Drakenstein Prison, puppet Chester Missing jokes with Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel and Archbishop Thabo Makgoba while they take part in the Human Chain, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela celebrates Madiba's gradual recovery and birthday outside his Pretoria hospital, and mayor Patricia de Lille met with schoolchildren at the Nelson Mandela exhibition at the Civic Centre. Photos: : Jeffrey Abrahams, Brenton Geach, David Ritchie and Reuters

## Zara Nicholson, Jason Felix and Sapa

A human chain linked Cape Town communities apartheid had divided yesterday in honour of Nelson Mandela's birthday as millions around the world marked Mandela Day with a kaleidoscope of good deeds.

Mandela's 95th birthday was celebrated with the good news that he was "smiling and alert" after spending more than 40 days in hospital.

Until now his condition has been described as critical, but stable.

The UN declared Mandela Day in 2009 on Mandela's 91st birthday, urging the people of the world to do at least 67 minutes of good for the less fortunate to mark the 67 years he spent in service to all South Africans and humanity. At a UN event in New York marking the day, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon hailed Mandela as "a giant of our times".

From early yesterday crowds of well-wishers gathered outside the Mediclinic Heart Hospital in Pretoria to wish the elder statesman well, singing *Happy Birthday* at the hospital entrance.

Mandela was admitted on June 8 with a recurring lung infection.

Mandela's example of leadership was "the gift that keeps on giving" and should be followed by all, said Planning Minister Trevor Manuel as he joined the human chain along Klipfontein

Road, which cuts through several suburbs from previously white Mowbray, coloured Athlone, Indian Rylands to African Gugulethu. According to the organisers, 5 000 people attended.

“The leadership we have in Mandela is a privilege. He is a leader not only to South Africans but to the world. In everything we do, we must use his example to inspire others and give them hope,” Manuel said. “He has given us a birthday present and that is a gift that keeps on giving.”

A sense of unity and pride was palpable as young and old, religious and other leaders held hands, read a pledge for Mandela Day to follow in his footsteps and sang *Happy Birthday* to the father of the nation.

The pelting rain did not deter participants, with hundreds of excited pupils, lining the road at intersections near their schools, waving South African flags big and small, all smiles and cheers in spite of the cold and the rain. Teachers appeared to have a hard time keeping them on the pavement as cars passed, hooting and flicking their lights at them in support of their show of unity.

Outside the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital, staff joined more pupils and members of the public in honour of Mandela, whose

foundation is raising R1 billion to build a second children’s hospital. St Theresa Primary School pupil Nazeera Benting, 14, said: “Madiba is my icon. I wish I had lived at the time to see him come out of prison.

“Madiba’s legacy not only reaches out to us, but to the whole world. I hope that the world keeps on praying for him to get better.”

Courtney Sampson, IEC provincial head, said: “There is still a very long road we have to walk to eradicate poverty and injustices, the things Madiba fought for. We need to hold hands from all walks of life to rectify the wrongs of the past.”

Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba said: “Communities from Rondebosch, Athlone and Gugulethu which apartheid sought to divide are defying that today by standing together.”

Former Black Sash president Mary Burton also braved the cold weather to join the human chain. “I loved the symbolism of the chain. It chained communities of all races together, communities that were separated by apartheid. I think it’s great that so many people came together to show their love for Madiba. He represents the best the country has.”

Top political analyst, puppet Chester Missing, said: “We need economic change so talk of diversity can be real, and we need to break down the idea of race and this human chain represents that.”

Speaking outside the Pretoria hospital, Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula said Mandela “opens his eyes and nods, as if to say, ‘I’m here with you and appreciate what you’re doing’. He looks at us, smiles and is alert. We want to thank the doctors because we owe everything to them”.

President Jacob Zuma, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Tshwane mayor Kgo-sientso Ramokgopa were among visitors. “When I visited him today, I found him really stable and I was able to say ‘happy birthday’ and he was able to smile,” Zuma said.

Family members had lunch together at the hospital and his daughter Zindzi said they gave him a collage of family photographs for a present. “Tata is making this remarkable progress and we look forward to having him back soon.”

Grandson Ndaba Mandela was more cautious: “He’s still critical... he’s just a lot more alert now, a lot more aware of his surroundings,” he said.

Former president FW de Klerk said Mandela was “approaching the end of his long walk to freedom”. “On his birthday, we should commemorate the remarkable contribution that he has made to South Africa and to all its people.”

SACP spokesman Malesela Maleka said: “Yes, Madiba remains a hero of all, but his heroism is owed to his loyalty to the movement under the leadership of the ANC.”

“We support the ‘67 minutes of service’ pledge to serve the community in honour of the 67 years Nelson Mandela spent serving the public,” DA leader Helen Zille said.

DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko and colleagues rolled up their sleeves to help out at the Othandweni Family Centre in Soweto.

The Food and Allied Workers’ Union said it was only right that the nation sacrificed its time to honour Mandela, after all his sacrifices.

SA Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Neren Rau hoped Mandela’s legacy would inspire all South Africans to build the nation.

AU Commission head Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma said Mandela’s values of solidarity, humanity, reconciliation and service to ordinary people were the foundation of the shared values of the continent.

The ANC thanked the people and organisations who had heeded the call to serve.

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