



Organization of African Unity

THE AFRICA PEACE AWARD

(AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES)

**Presented to President NELSON MANDELA
by
Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General**

**City Hall
Durban, South Africa**

18 March 1995

PRESENTATION OF THE "AFRICA PEACE AWARD" TO
PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF OAU
CITY HALL, DURBAN - MARCH 18, 1995

Your Excellency President Nelson Mandela,
Your Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini,
Your Excellency, the Premier of Kwazulu-Natal,
Dr. Frank Mdalalose,
Honourable Ministers,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In October 1963, when addressing the Court, Nelson Mandela, the freedom fighter stated, virtually from the innermost of his being:

".... Your Worship, I hate racial discrimination most intensely and in all its manifestations. I have fought it all my life. I fight it now, and I will do so until the end of my days....."

Again, on Monday, 20 April 1964, during the conclusion of his address to the Court at the Rivonia trial, a trial in which there was real possibility that he could be sentenced to death, he issued his most famous and powerful statement, in fact a veritable article of faith, which reverberated beyond the borders of South Africa and I quote:

"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

That is the man, we are gathered here today to honour as one of the greatest sons of Africa, a World Statesman and a legend in his lifetime. We are assembled here to recognize his commitment to the cause of African redemption and renaissance and to acknowledge the contribution of the single most important symbol of the Pan-African quest for the restoration of the dignity of the African person and the central symbol of the unity of South Africa.

It therefore gives me the greatest pleasure and honour, as Secretary General of the OAU, not only to return to South Africa almost one year after its political liberation, but more importantly, to be associated with this important and historic event in honour of a giant in contemporary history.

As an African, indeed as a person, this is a moving moment for me. Like many young Africans, Mandela has been my hero from the time I finished high school. In fact, it was he who inspired us and many generations of Africans, to carry on the struggle not only in our respective countries, but also in consistent support of the struggle for freedom and dignity in this great country. The question however remained whether Mandela, the prisoner of conscience, the leader in jail, the symbol of resistance and the source of inspiration to millions in Africa and beyond would live up to his legend - upon his freedom.

The ceremony that has brought us here today, under the auspices of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes - ACCORD - is eloquent testimony to the fact that indeed Mandela has lived up to his legend and been able to meet the challenge.

I wish to seize this opportunity to commend ACCORD for having instituted the African Peace Award in 1993 to recognize those communities, institutions or individuals who make concrete contributions to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. At its inception, and understandably so, ACCORD selected the community of **MPUMALANGA**, situated West of Durban and known at the time as "**LITTLE BEIRUT**" or the "**Killing fields of South Africa**". The selection of **MPUMALANGA** was in recognition of the community's courage in standing up to prejudice, poverty and protracted violence and therefore giving South Africans hope for the future.

MPUMALANGA was not an isolated case in South Africa. Indeed, only a year ago, there were serious misgivings on the part of both blacks and whites over the future of this country. Racial antagonism was bitter and internecine conflict rampant in various parts of South Africa, especially in the PWV and Natal Regions which had shown immense potential for deep divisions and even disintegration.

However, having witnessed the remarkably peaceful elections and how the people of South Africa rendered unimportant and peripheral those bitter contradictions and differences that characterized their society, we at the

Organization of African Unity could not but identify ourselves with the great miracle and dynamics of the peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we honour Nelson Mandela, the single most vital symbol not only of liberation from the tyranny of apartheid but of a new way of life in South Africa.

For those who may be tempted to ask why this great Statesman of our time deserves the honour being bestowed on him today, it is important to situate his role within the context of the environment in which he matured into young adulthood. In those early years, South Africa was very different from the rest of the Continent and, for that matter, from the rest of the world. There was the colour bar, overcrowded slums and constant harassment of the majority by the police, under the Pass Laws. South Africa was organized, policed and armed in such a way that it was easy for a white minority to subjugate and repress the majority and maintain power, wealth and privilege. It was under these conditions that President Mandela was politically educated.

As a young lawyer, Mandela could have chosen the easy way of consolidating his law practice and taking full advantage of his position in society. He instead, like most men marked for greatness, opted for the difficult experience of spending a lifetime of suffering at the hands of a heartless regime. It is therefore, most remarkable, that in spite of all the persecution and humiliation he suffered,

President Mandela never for once allowed those experiences to cloud his sense of mission and therefore confuse what the struggle was all about, namely: a fight against oppression rather than one between blacks and whites.

Indeed, even when he was forced, in his own words to become "**a creature of the night**", Tata Mandela remained a perfect exemplification of the absolute refusal to respond in kind to racialism. It is to his eternal credit that he does not harbour bitterness for those who almost ruined his life and is willing to see the good in people. This generosity of heart toward even those who wanted to destroy him, had most definitely brought him closer to his goal of forging a nation out of a divided land.

In fostering the quest for democracy in South Africa, Nelson Mandela guided the struggle of his people from the prison walls and when he was eventually released, joined the powerful external and internal forces, which combined to make negotiations, a compelling option to deal with the transition from domination to democracy. Consequently, the negotiations at CODESA 1 and 2, as well as the Multi-Party Negotiating Forum all bore the imprints of Mandela the man, a practised seeker of unity and consensus, whose style derives from hard-won discipline.

As a leader, President Mandela understands his people's needs and experiences, and unremittingly articulates their basic demands. But this is hardly surprising for a man who contributed immensely to the drafting of a document like the Freedom Charter. As rightly noted by the ANC itself in

1962, Mandela is a leader who is always in dynamic contact with the masses. Indeed, when he declared during his trial thirty years ago, that he cherished the idea of a new South Africa, where all South Africans are equal, and where all South Africans would work together to bring about security, peace and democracy in the country, he was speaking with the vision, courage and accommodation of a Statesman who commands universal respect as evidenced by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

The Mandela that we honour today, epitomizes the nobility of the African heart at its very best, a charismatic leader who has never sought to impose his decisions on his people. He continues to possess all the attributes of a good leader: a strong personality, ability, stature, calmness, tact and conviction. Rather than dictate, Mandela would always discuss, argue with and be guided by the opinion of his colleagues. Such attributes, coupled with his gracious, amiable and gentlemanly nature, combine to make him the subtle master of every situation. These were the qualities which President Mandela brought to bear on the events which were to change and shape the future of his country - the process of fundamental transition at a time when two clearly discernible trends were influencing international relations namely the trend towards good governance and a commitment to a democratic system of government.

At a time when we, on the Continent, are preoccupied with Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the contribution of South Africa, engineered by leaders like President Mandela, offer silver linings on the horizon beyond

the borders of South Africa. I do indeed recall the efforts which were made to bring about a peaceful resolution of the mayhem which was raging in South Africa at the turn of this decade. It is important in particular to underscore the contribution of President Mandela to the signing of the National Peace Accord, which structures, contributed immensely to the reduction of violence, thereby creating an enabling environment for the unleashing of creative energy to negotiate away domination.

For the rest of Africa therefore, there are obvious lessons to be learnt, especially in those countries where ethnic factors continue to jeopardize unity and national cohesion.

Apart from our Continent, the tireless efforts which were deployed by President Mandela to ensure peaceful coexistence and an all-inclusive settlement instead of following the "winner takes all" logic, is an important lesson for the rest of the world, especially in the many areas where intolerance and the politics of exclusiveness, as well as ethnic cleansing, continue to divide communities that had hitherto coexisted together.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's ceremony not only represents a celebration of the triumph of the human spirit and justice over the forces of darkness and oppression, but, more significantly, is a tribute to the fighting spirit of President Mandela, an acknowledgement of his capacity and determination to deal with

the many and enormous problems that bedevil the people of South Africa and humanity. In the same way as the struggle and victory of the majority of the people over bigotry and racism represented a universal victory, so will the second phase of the struggle, which began after South Africa's elections, equally bring about the triumph of our common humanity over hunger, joblessness, homelessness and misery.

President Mandela's travails and long walk to freedom started from the round thatched huts of the Transkei, through prison and ended in a jubilant and triumphant liberation, which placed him at the head of a democratically elected Government - a process that took almost fifty years to achieve. Indeed, even though leading a liberation struggle is a task fundamentally different from heading a government, there is no doubt whatsoever, that his style of leadership is suited to the task of governance.

For all of us, Africans, Asians, Europeans, Americans who have, so to say, internalized the personality of this gigantic figure, a household name all over the world, it is therefore a matter of pride that in freedom, Mandela has continued to live up to the expectations and remained the legend that he is in his own lifetime.

It is in this frame of mind, that I have the singular honour to perform this most pleasant duty of presenting the African Peace Award for 1995 to His Excellency President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela with my fervent congratulations and best wishes.