

A Farewell To Madiba!

National Assembly, Cape Town, March 26, 1999.

Madame Speaker
Chairperson of the Council of Provinces
Honourable Members
Mr President

Isinamva liyabukwa
Mhla wasabel'igwijo,
Uthwel'uthuli lwezitho zabaphambili,
Wadad'emafini nje ngokhozi,
Wadelel'inkunzana nje ngemamb'emnyama,
Lath'izulu liqulath'indudumo nombane,
Ladedel'ilanga nalo lithand'ukubuka libukele,
Azoth' amazwe onke ngokuthethelwa ngamehlo,
Evulel'ithutyana lwemilozi kubantwana bezulu,
Ndlebe zibanzi ziphulaphul'izingqi zekhehle,
De wavulek'uqhoqhoqho siyinginginya sisonke,
Ngoba namhlanje sifun'ukukhahlela sithi,
Sina ndini!
Madiba!
Dalibunga!
Msimbithi we sizwe!
Nkom'eduna yomthonyama!
Sithwalandwe!

You have walked along the road of the heroes and the heroines.

You have borne the pain of those who have known fear and learnt to conquer it.

You have marched in front when comfort was in the midst of the ranks

You have laughed to contend against a river of tears.

You have cried to broadcast a story of joy.

And now you leave this hallowed place to continue to march in front of a different detachment of the same army of the sun.

Not the comfort of the fond superintendence of the growing stalks of the maize plant or of the Ngunki herd with its milk, its flesh or its hide.

Nor the pleasant chatter of your grand-children with mountains to climb which are but little mounds.

Not the pensive silence of the elderly, whose burdened minds cascade backwards because to look too much into the future is to impose a burden on bones that have grown old.

You leave us here not because you have to stop.

You leave us here because you have to start again.

The accident of your birth should have condemned you to a village.

Circumstances you did not choose should have confined you to a district.

Your sight, your heart and your mind could have reached no further than the horizon of the natural eye.

But you have been where you should not have been.

You have faced death and said - do your worst!

You have inhabited the dark, dark dungeons of freedom denied, itself a denial to live in a society where freedom was denied.

You have looked at the faces of some of those who were your comrades, who turned their eyes away from you because somewhere in their mortal being there lingered the remnants of a sense of shame, always and for ever whispering softly - no to treachery! a thing in the shadows, present at every dawn, repeating, repeating, repeating - I am Conscience, to whom you have denied a home.

You have not asked - who indeed are these for whose lives I was prepared to die!

You have asked who am I, that I too did not falter, so that I too could turn my own eyes away from myself and another, who was a comrade.

You have stood at the brink, when you had to appeal to the gods about whether to win a dishonourable peace or to lose the lives of your people, and decided that none among these would exchange their lives for an existence without honour.

You have been where nobody should be asked to be.

You have carried burdens heavier than those who felt it their responsibility and right to proclaim you an enemy of the state.

You have to convince your enemies to believe a story difficult to believe, because it was true, that your burnished spear glittered in the rays of the sun, not to speak of hatred and death from them, but because you prayed that its blinding brilliance would tell them, whose ears would not hear, that you loved them as your own kith and kin.

You have had to bear the mantle of sainthood when all you sought was pride in the knowledge that you were a good foot soldier for justice and freedom.

But despite it all and because of it all, we are blessed.

We are blessed because you have walked along the road of our heroes and heroines.

For centuries our own African sky has been dark with suffering and foreboding.

But because we have never surrendered, for centuries the menace in our African sky has been brightened by the light of our stars.

In the darkness of our night, the victory of the Khoikhoi in 1510 here in Table Bay, when they defeated and killed the belligerent Portuguese admiral and aristocrat, Dom Francisco de Almeida, the first Portuguese viceroy in India, has lit our skies for ever.

In the darkness of our night, Autshumato, the Khoikhoi leader who was the first political prisoner on Robben Island, shone on our firmament as our star of hope.

And so these and other since, the kings and queens and generals and warriors who resisted Africa's colonisation, the leaders who, and the movements which fought for African emancipation - these who are, permanently, our heroes and heroines - have come and gone, over the generations, one after the other, each to take his or her place as a star in the African sky.

Among them are our own, whose names we recite to tell ourselves that we are - black liberators, white liberators, human beings, whose only fault has been to strive to live as human beings.

Among these, Madiba, we recite your name, because your fault too, for which you have paid your price, was that yours strived so that you, together with us, could live as a human being.

As these human beings, we have, for five years, traversed the rooms and passages that surround us and occupied this theatre of drama and farce and the birth of the new, carrying on our foreheads the title - the law makers!

The sense of wonder still pervades our ranks that out of the tumult and the babble of tongues, the veiled enmities and the bloodless wars, there could have arisen over our devastated land, out of this house, with its own history, the sun of hope.

Though standing like little giants, because we stand on your shoulders and others of your generation, we must proclaim it to the world that here, in these houses of the law-givers, we have striven to do the right things, because to have done otherwise would have been to condemn ourselves to carry, for all time, the burden of having insulted all the sacrifices you made.

Others, before us, who also had the power to decide how each and all shall behave, according to such rules and regulations they were empowered to set, arrived from Europe at the Cape of Good Hope on the 23rd of December, 1802.

These were the representatives of the Batavian Republic of the Netherlands.

As they landed on the shores of our oceans, only a heckler's shout from where you sit, Madiba, they carried in their heads the lesson they had been taught, on "Methods to Follow when Attending Savage Peoples". And here is an example of their lessons:

Convey to them our arts,
but not our corruption,
the code of our morals,
and not the example of our vices,
our sciences and not our dogmas,
the advantages of civilisation,
and not their abuses,
conceal from them how the people
in our more enlightened countries,
defame one another, and degrade
themselves by their passions.

On the 10th of May, five years ago, you stood in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria to proclaim to the universe that the sun could never set on so glorious a human achievement as was celebrated that day.

Black and white South Africans had, at last, arrived at the point when, together, they could say:

Let us nurture our arts, and not our corruption.
Let us communicate morality, and not our vices.
Let us advance science, and not our dogmas.
Let us advance civilisation, and not abuse.

After a long walk, we too have arrived at the starting point of a new journey.

We have you, Madiba, as our nearest and brightest star to guide us on our way.

We will not get lost.