

**Toast to President Nelson Mandela on the Occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday:  
Proposed by Thabo Mbeki**

Gallagher Estate, Midrand, 19 July 1998

Master of Ceremonies  
President Nelson Mandela and Mrs Graça Machel,  
Distinguished guests:

Happy circumstances have conspired to give us the rare pleasure today to celebrate both the four-score maturity of the President of our democratic Republic, Nelson Mandela, and his marriage to a gracious lady, Graça Machel.

Speaking to his daughter, Cordelia, the old King Lear of Shakespeare's tragedies says:

"Come, let's away to prison:  
We two alone will sing like birds in the cage,...  
So we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,  
Who loses, and who wins; who's in, who's out,...  
And we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,  
That ebb and flow by the moon...  
Upon such sacrifices...  
The gods themselves throw incense."

Happily, Mr President, you and your bride will have no occasion to go to prison, there to sing alone like birds in the cage.

As citizens of the world, the property of all humanity, we invite you to treat the world as your stage, there to continue to sing, uncaged, of freedom, of peace, of human dignity, of the eradication of poverty, of friendship among the peoples.

As Lear wished for himself and his offspring, we too urge you to live, and pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh at the gilded butterflies which will continue to come to you to tell you all manner of idle gossip about who has lost and who has won and who is in and who is out.

But above all, we thank you for your sacrifices, which brought hope to the people of the world.

You have shown fortitude in the face of the Mozambican blood that was needlessly shed at Mbuzini on our own territory and the cruelty of almost three decades of imprisonment by those who had no moral authority to rule.

You refused to sink into bitterness and despair, driven by the reality of having been the intended victims of great misfortunes.

The fact that, still, you live and smile and laugh and give hope to the children and those who have suffered less than you have, constitutes an injunction that we celebrate the birthday of such great human beings and celebrate also that you, Madiba, have been joined in matrimony with another who gave so much to ensure that we too, could live in conditions of liberty and prosperity.

You too, like the Duke of Albany in "King Lear", could have lost faith in our unjust world and repeated his words:

"If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,  
'T will come,  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep."

Rather than lose faith, you took the decision that you would give more of yourselves, to ensure that humanity does not, like the monsters of the deep, prey on itself as some of that humanity had sought to prey on you.

Upon such sacrifices, the gods themselves throw incense.

We are privileged that we sit here as part of our world, to absorb the fragrance of the incense of the gods, sprinkled on two outstanding African whose entitlement to an accolade of the gods none can question.

May I request everyone to rise and to share in a toast as we say:

A happy 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mr President!

Long may you live and prosper!

A happy married life to Mr and Mrs Nelson and Graça Mandela!

To the President and the First Lady - Siyinqaba!