

# UN marks 100 years since Mandela's birth with a vow to continue struggle for equality

Taking stock of his "vast" legacy for mankind, the United Nations will mark 100 years since the birth of the late anti-Apartheid activist, Nelson Mandela, on Wednesday.

"Nelson Mandela was a towering global advocate for justice and equality", said UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in his video message for [Nelson Mandela International Day](#), annually observed on 18 July, which was inaugurated by UN General Assembly in November 2009, in recognition of his global contribution to the culture of peace and freedom.

Mr. Mandela, who died in 2013, was the first democratically-elected president of South Africa and the country's first black head of State. He had been in prison for 27 years on charges of sabotage before being released and eventually elected president.

"He continues to inspire the world through his example of courage and compassion. Nelson Mandela was held captive for many years. But he never became a prisoner of his past", Mr. Guterres said, noting that Mandela poured his energy into reconciliation and his vision of a peaceful, multi-ethnic, democratic South Africa.

"Rarely has one person in history done so much to stir people's dreams and move them to action", the UN chief said. "That struggle for equality, dignity and justice continues."

In December 2015, the General Assembly decided to extend the scope of Nelson Mandela International Day to also promote humane conditions of imprisonment and to encourage societies everywhere to treat prisoners as a continuous part of society by adopting the revised UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the "[Nelson Mandela Rules](#)".

The Rules added important safeguards, including an absolute prohibition on torture and ill-treatment and clear restrictions on the use of solitary confinement, instruments of restraint and intrusive searches, as well as detailed guidance on prisoners' rights to equivalent health-care services.

"Nelson Mandela spent [27 years in prison](#) in the course of his struggle for justice. He knew better than anyone that 'no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones'", said Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)).

He said his Office will assist all countries in translating these rules into action, to promote humane conditions of imprisonment and ensure no part of

society is forgotten.

“Nelson Mandela International Day 2018 marks 100 years since the birth of a true hero who left the world a better and more just place than he found it,” Mr. Fedotov said.