

Winnie Mandela left an 'indelible mark on the history of the 20th century,' says UN chief

"She was an international symbol of resistance who left an indelible mark on the history of the 20th century," he added.

Mr. Guterres said the outpouring of condolences since her passing shows what an enormous impact Ms. Mandela had not only on the people of South Africa and on the African continent, but for millions around the world.

"Faced with the most heinous of racist and discriminatory regimes, she helped lead the way in showing what it takes to overcome such tyranny – strength, defiance and courage," he said.

The UN chief outlined her personal sacrifices, such as enduring harassment, torture and imprisonment, while noting that her resistance inspired others to keep hope alive through the struggle's darkest periods.

"'We are aware that the road before us is uphill, but we shall fight to the bitter end for justice,'" Mr. Guterres said, quoting Ms. Mandela's remarks following the Soweto uprising and student demonstrations in the mid 1970s.

Noting that while all her actions could not be condoned, the Secretary-General stressed Ms. Madikizela-Mandela's dedication as a strong, fearless woman, who "had to fight patriarchy's definitions of womanhood."

"The combination of patriarchy and racism together meant that black women confronted enormous obstacles from the cradle to the grave – making her own achievements all the more exceptional," he stressed.

In the decades-long fight against apartheid, Mr. Guterres said that the UN stood with Ms. Madikizela-Mandela and South Africa, as they faced unrelenting racism and discrimination.

"Today, as we remember her," he said, "the United Nations reaffirms its commitment to the ideals of equality, justice and humanity for all."

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the UN General Assembly, remarked that Ms. Madikizela-Mandela was willing to sacrifice everything to change the world around her.

"And, we owe [a great debt](#), to people like this," he said. "Their sacrifices benefit all of those who come after them. And [...] change the course of history."

Mr. Lajčák elaborated that in standing up to the political and social structures of her own country, she met strong resistance.

“She was taken away from her children. She was imprisoned. She was tortured,” he maintained. “Yet, she continued to demand an end to injustice. And she inspired many others to do the same – both within and outside the borders of South Africa.”

By refusing to accept the limits of patriarchy, Ms. Madikizela-Mandela also changed the role of women. Her activism led to women’s rights becoming enshrined in South Africa’s new constitution and also ensuring that the reconciliation process that followed was shaped by women.

“And, I believe there were ripple effects, on the international stage,” he argued, citing strengthened women’s roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

“Perhaps this is not something we immediately think of, when we pay tribute to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. But her contribution cannot be overlooked,” he said.