

Reaction to the death of Nelson Mandela

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(RNS) As the world reacted to the death of South African hero Nelson Mandela, on Thursday (Dec. 5) at age 95, religious and political leaders added their voices to remember the man who brought down his nation's race-dividing apartheid system. Here's a sampling:

"We will not likely see the likes of Nelson Mandela again. So it falls to us as best we can to forward the example that he set: to make decisions guided not by hate, but by love; to never discount the difference that one person can make; to strive for a future that is worthy of his sacrifice. For now, let us pause and give thanks for the fact that Nelson Mandela lived — a man who took history in his hands, and bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice. May God bless his memory and keep him in peace."

- **President Obama**

"Paying tribute to the steadfast commitment shown by Nelson Mandela in promoting the human dignity of all the nation's citizens and in forging a new South Africa built on the firm foundations of non-violence, reconciliation and truth, I pray that the late president's example will inspire generations of South Africans to put justice and the common good at the forefront of their political aspirations."

- **Pope Francis**

"The values that Mandela lived were derived from the traditions of his people, consistent with the best teaching of his Christian educators and the ecumenical movement. They are values that inspired the long walk from apartheid to freedom

and that transformed South Africa during his presidency. They are ideals that have much to contribute to the continuing life of his country and every country.”

- The Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary, World Council of Churches

“Was he a saint? Not if a saint is entirely flawless. I believe he was saintly because he inspired others powerfully and revealed in his character, transparently, many of God’s attributes of goodness: compassion, concern for others, desire for peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Thank God for this remarkable gift to South Africa and the world. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.”

- Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, writing in The Washington Post

“In his struggle against apartheid rule, Nelson Mandela was a light for peace and equality in his country and for the whole world. His years of imprisonment exemplified the suffering experienced by so many who seek justice. As president of South Africa, Mandela sought to undo the structures that marginalized and impoverished people — work Pope Francis is now challenging the entire world to imitate.”

- Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

“The world has lost a great leader. Nelson Mandela was a model of courage, vision and personal sacrifice. Today more than ever we need this kind of leadership. May the memory of Nelson Mandela inspire a new generation of such leaders around the world.”

- Geoff Tunnicliffe, secretary-general of the World Evangelical Alliance

“Nelson Mandela’s signature contribution was demonstrating the power of and ethos of forgiveness as a political concept, not only to prevent bloodshed but to bring to life the potential of a new society. Jews around the world shared with Mandela the commitment to continuing dialogue, even amidst difference, and the experience of how forgiveness and understanding can lead to the constant moral development of nations and peoples in an imperfect world.”

- Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president, Rabbinical Assembly

“We knew Nelson Mandela as a committed Christian who sought equal rights for all and a democratic South Africa. He is a towering figure of world historical importance. We urge Christians everywhere and congregations to say prayers of thanksgiving for his life and his achievements.”

- The Rev. Jim Winkler, incoming general secretary and president of the National Council of Churches

“With the passing of this great man, the world has lost a remarkable emancipator. Mandela blazed a trail of respect for human dignity and human rights. We cannot afford to forget the unbounded passion for freedom, the relentless striving for justice and the unshakeable commitment to peaceful human coexistence that Mandela exhibited.”

- Neville Callam, general secretary, Baptist World Alliance

“He wrote a new chapter on the power of dialogue which he, a helpless prisoner, initiated with his powerful captors. And he did all of this without losing his dignity, without compromising his principles, and without being intimidated by the power of the apartheid regime.”

- Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, chair of the board of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions

“He helped the world to see a shining vision of the incarnate Reign of God. We pray that it was not simply a brief glimpse, but that his labor may be joined to that of others, grounding and growing a world of peace with justice for all. May God welcome this shepherd home in peace.”

- Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori

“Nelson Mandela’s life embodied the idea of prophetic activism with an unquenchable thirst for justice. His struggle for equality brought down one of the final strongholds of segregation and subsequently empowered an entire continent to overcome by doing justice and loving mercy. His life inspired us while his humble demeanor will continue to move us towards a more just and loving world.”

- The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

“His unjust decades-long imprisonment made him a symbol of the horrors of apartheid. Yet by using his influence after being liberated to champion human rights for all, reconciliation for his divided country, and to lead his nation into a new democratic era, Mr. Mandela inspired the world.”

- Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

“Just as this year’s Hanukkah lights ended, with their celebration of freedom from oppression and victory over tyranny, we learned one of the brightest lights in the world, Nelson Mandela, had made his transition.”

- The Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook, former U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom

“Nelson Mandela will be long remembered as one of the greatest figures of his generation and one of the most inspirational and effective freedom-fighting figures in modern history. In a world where the word ‘hero’ is too readily bandied about, Nelson Mandela was a true hero of freedom who brought historic change, and did so peacefully. “

- Abraham Foxman, national director, Anti-Defamation League

“President Mandela’s life is the closest thing we have to proof of God.”

- Former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger