



United Nations

**EX TEMPORE STATEMENT AT THE MEMORIAL
SERVICE FOR MR. NELSON MANDELA**

10 December 2013

Tehran, Iran

Gary Lewis

UN Resident Coordinator

and

UNDP Resident Representative

Benameh Khoda – Salaam va asr bekheyr

And to my friends from South Africa – ***Saubona***

Your Excellency Ambassador Whitehead, Madam Ambassador Whitehead,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

Many words have been spoken tonight about Madiba. Across the world – today – many words have been spoken – and will be spoken. And I feel that I may not – with my few humble words – be able to do justice to what others have said. So I will limit my observations tonight to three simple things.

The first is to say, on behalf of the United Nations and its member states, our sincere condolences to the people of great Republic of South Africa.

The second thing is to say that let us recognize that we celebrate the life of Madiba **today** – which is a special day because it is also World Human Rights Day. And if anyone is asked to identify a human being who best personifies what human rights means – that is Mr. Mandela.

Yes, we have a Universal Declaration of Human Rights that is written down. But all those rights start from one premise. And that is that we must respect and recognize our brothers and sisters in dignity. And that – for me – and I believe also for Madiba – is what human rights means.

The third thing that I would like to do tonight is to share with you an impression I have of Madiba. My wife, my family and I were privileged to call South Africa our home for five wonderful years. And I was privileged to be in the presence of Madiba. And what I noticed was not so much the man, but the impression that he created on everyone in the room.

To all of us – I think – we wondered: how can a man who has endured so much be so compassionate and so humble? And as I looked around the room I saw people thinking “Why can’t we be more like this man?” And this is the impression that stuck with me from many years after I left South Africa.

So if I had the opportunity to see him again I would say: “Thank you – Sir – for personifying the ideals of the United Nations – the ideals of peace, the ideals of justice, ideals of human rights – ideals whose time has come.

So as we say goodbye to this man who was a living legend, let us also say two simple things. May his soul rest in peace – and may we take inspiration for what his life meant for freedom.

Tashakor mikonam.