

The World Unites Behind Mandela: An Unreported Message From The United Nations

By [Danny Schechter](#)

Global Research, December 24, 2013

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Millions of South Africans mourned the death of Nelson Mandela as you would expect, but the rest of world also joined in an unprecedented display of the same international solidarity that for years helped South Africa isolate its enemies and overthrow apartheid.

Mandela was not the first Third World revolutionary to become so popular in the West—just think of all the images of Cuba’s Che Guevara that remain proudly displayed on T-shirts the world over. Yet, Mandela built an international community of supporters that transcended ideological/political differences, races and cultures.

Nations not known for being supportive of the liberation movement he headed want to be thought of as Mandela backers.

Even Israel, whose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu begged off an invitation to attend a memorial service in Johannesburg because he ostensibly ‘could not afford’ to come—other Israelis did attend—is now floating claims that their intelligence service assisted Mandela through support from a Intelligence operative in the Mossad back in 1962 who gave him a pistol.

Israel later became an ally of the apartheid government, helping them develop a nuclear weapon,

The claim of Israel’s largesse got a big spread in the [Haaretz newspaper](#), and was clearly targeted at Israeli critics who are now boycotting the self-styled “Jewish State,” denouncing it for apartheid practices, just as South Africa was boycotted with international sanctions.

With many South Africans including Mandela’s closest prison comrade Ahmad Kathrada supporting the boycott of Israel, [The Nelson Mandela Center of Memory, an institution](#) he created as an objective source of historical information, looked into the Israeli report and said it cannot be confirmed.

Wrote the foundation, “The Nelson Mandela Foundation can confirm that it has not located any evidence in Nelson Mandela’s private archive (which includes his 1962 diary and notebook) that he interacted with an Israeli operative during his tour of African countries in that year. Both the diary and the notebook were used as evidence against him in the 1963-1964 Rivonia Trial for sabotage.”

What hasn’t been reported is a fact, shared with me, by Kathrada who was asked by

Mandela to procure books on armed struggles worldwide before he launched the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation.)

"Everything that Madiba did was well planned and thorough," he told me for a documentary I am making on the meaning of the movie *Mandela Long Walk To Freedom*. He also said that among the movements Mandela studied was [guerilla warfare in Israel against the British](#). Mandela later spoke out supporting Palestinian rights.

The world was focused on the speeches made by 91 Presidents and heads of State at the Memorial Service in Johannesburg, but the longest and most publicized was given by President Obama for consumption mostly on US TV.

A South African government speech writer dissected Obama's technique, explaining: "In particular Obama's speech is very strong on word pairs, not alliterative pairs like "sense and sensibility" or "pride and prejudice", but simple pairs like "a son and husband, a father and a friend". The use of pairs or the use of two words when one will do creates a sense of stability and authority (one word would have sufficed there, but two gives you the sense that I know what I am talking about)....

He warns against "too many of us" paying lip service to Mandela's principles while ignoring them in practice. He slips a "too many leaders" variation into the triple, "who claim solidarity with Madiba's struggle for freedom, but do not tolerate dissent from their own people". Of whom was he thinking?"

Commenting on the speech in the Readers Blog of Johannesburg's Mail & Guardian newspaper, a reader who calls himself "George Orwell," wrote:

"[I] think you credit B.O. with too many literary skills. The praise goes to his speechwriter, Ben Rhodes.

Rhodes is the man with the pen skills, he comes from a fiction writing background, which is just about the right experience for political persuasion, n'est ce pas?

Rhodes penned all the stirring propaganda that Obama's wealthy Wall Street backers required to oil their man's way into high office."

I was troubled by the extensive air time Obama was given, to the exclusion of other world leaders, at the Memorial event in Johannesburg. Perhaps that's why the UN General Assembly organized its own special tribute to Mandela so that every country could equally be heard.

I was delighted to be invited by the UN as a 'special guest" to the event that took place in the Trusteeship Council because the "GA," as its known' is being physically reconstructed. I attended along with several anti-apartheid activists including actor Danny Glover and African-American journalist Herb Boyd.

I was told that the speeches were mostly for the domestic audiences in the various countries, many of whom were hardly high profile supporters of Mandela and the ANC. Said one former official, "It is important for everyone to know how remarkable Madiba was."

As you would expect, American and global television did not cover this international

outpouring for Mandela. To hear them tell it, ‘we have done Mandela! or “We Are Mandela’d out!”

South Africa spoke first, thanking the many country’s present for this meaningful tribute. The Russian Federation and China were represented as was Fiji, Algeria, Morocco, Jamaica, Cuba and Venezuela, 37 nations in all.

UN speechmaking can be deadly but on this occasion there was a rare unanimity and passion among the Nations of the world, especially from Africa, Asia, Latin America.

First, various regional entities, like ASEAN of Asia, the Group of 77, The Non-Aligned Movement based in Iran, CARICOM of the Caribbean, the EU of Europe, and the organization of South American states rose to praise Mandela and call attention to his global significance and impact on their peoples.

And then, one by one, UN Permanent representatives rose to make speeches, express “Eternal Glory” and share anecdotes about his visit to their countries and what about the man and his values touched them. Some became more emotional than is common in diplomatic circles.

Some like the representative of Jamaica mentioned songs by their reggae stars, Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, that galvanized world opinion. Morocco praised Stevie Wonder.

Algeria cited Mandela’s support for their national liberation struggle in 1962, and the military training they offered him. They reported that there had been six days of official mourning.

The Algerian rep reminded the other countries that when it led the General Assembly, it got apartheid South Africa tossed out, just one of the many resolutions and act of solidarity with the then struggling people of South Africa. Significantly, although An African state, Algeria is an Arabic speaking country.

Zambia, the country that hosted the ANC in exile spoke of their prolonged national commemorations. Zambia was bombed by South Africa because of its supportive stance.

Cuba took pride in its active help for the fight against apartheid—it sent troops to combat the South African invasion of Angola. Bolivia praised him as fellow Socialist. Argentina hailed him for his humanism and persistence. Others spoke of his compassion and support for the fight against AIDs.

Britain was one of the few Western governments that praised Mandela but did not mention the remarks by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who had labeled him a terrorist.

Each nation spoke with an almost personal sense of connection with this African leader as if he belonged to them.

China stressed the sincerity of its relationship with Africa as well.

These were all diplomats in a very formal setting controlled by UN rules—but a sense of global support and even love came through much more directly than it did in the official South African funeral.

It was a rare global moment that's showed how Mandela and the ANC had unified world opinion.

Yes, UN talkfests don't change the world—they can come off as a tower of babble—but events like this put countries on the record, and reinforced a sense of support.

Flawed as it may be, the General Assembly is a global Hyde Park, but rarely as emotional and positive. It is one of the few institutions open to all countries on an equal basis.

It was clear Mandela had become a hero for all, and a person who brought a problem-obsessed world with few such giants together, if just for a few hours, and just in time for Christmas when the movie about him opens nationwide in the US.

*News Dissector **Danny Schechter** directed 6 documentaries with Nelson Mandela. His new book, Madiba A-Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela, offers a new unconventional biography. Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.*

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