

# Abune Yacob's Speech during Nelson Mandela's Memorial at UNISA – December 11, 2013

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*Editor note: Ethiopian Orthodox Church has got a strong attachment with South African's apartheid struggle. In addition to University of South Africa (UNISA) memorial the EOTC held another memorial and prayers at Johannesburg Holy Savior Cathedral and Pretoria Kidan Miheret Church.*

## **Memorial Service of Dr. Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela, UNISA**

*December 11, 2013*

Dear Respected family members of the Honorable Dr. Nelson Mandela, the Government bodies and people of the great nation of the Republic of South Africa,

Dear participants of this memorial service,

I humbly salute you In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen!

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is the first and foremost church on the face of the earth. The first church next to Jerusalem was established in Ethiopia. It is a member of one of the six oriental Orthodox churches with strong ties to the Egyptian Coptic sister Church established under the See of Saint Mark the Apostle. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has a long and fruitful relationship with the people of South Africa and has been an inspiration for several freedom fighters including Dr. Nelson Mandela. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church has an active presence in South Africa since 1892 especially in Eastern and Western Cape. It officially started its expansion starting 1983. *In the Acts of the Apostles 8: 26-40, we are told of the Ethiopian Eunuch, the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who went to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. There he met Philip the Apostle, and was baptized by him. It follows that he returned home and evangelized the people.* The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church knows and understands the true value of freedom given by God to His creation and thereby has been a symbol of freedom for many .That was the reason why the Ethiopian Orthodox Church fathers and the government officials have supported and welcomed the visit of Dr. Nelson Mandela in the 1960s.

In July 1962, when a Colonel known by the name Fekadu Wakene , member of the then special police force unit of the Ethiopian army, knew little about his new guest student whom he was told to train, owing to the top secrecy of the mission. Colonel Fekadu had been told to train Mandela by his commanding officer, General Taddesse Birru, an

assistant commissioner during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie. The political activist, Dr. Nelson Mandela, learned the tricks of guerilla warfare at Kolfe police barracks still located in Addis Ababa. Dr. Mandela was in Ethiopia learning how to be the commander in chief of “Umkhonto we Sizwe” – the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC).

Dr. Mandela was in Ethiopia at the invitation of the Emperor Haile Selassie, who was a devoted Orthodox Christian and an ardent supporter of Africa’s decolonization and African unity with the likes of Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Oliver Tambo of South Africa, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and several others. At the time, Ethiopia had one of the strongest armed forces on the continent. The Emperor had invited many other African liberation struggle fighters to be trained on Ethiopian soil. Dr. Mandela’s military training included briefing on military science, how to run an army, and how to use a gun.

Dr. Mandela is a man who lifted South Africa from the darkness of apartheid, from a world wrapped in hatred, beset by fear, racked by violence, and numbed by indifference. Doctor Mandela was an architect. He built a magnificent tower of multiracial democracy on the ashes of apartheid. Dr. Mandela was a great alchemist. He transformed hate into love, fear into courage, doubt into faith, intolerance into compassion, anger into understanding, discord into harmony and shame into dignity. Dr. Mandela once said “I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying”. Dr. Mandela was not an idealist; he was a pragmatist. He chose the path of truth and reconciliation because these paths lead to dignity, peace and justice. Dr. Mandela’s long walk to freedom was filled with courage, patience, perseverance, humility and generosity.

Dr. Mandela saw power as the will of the people, as a means to effectuate the will of the people; as a means and not an end in itself. He believed in using power to do good; to protect the powerless from the powerful; to prevent the abuse of power, to use power to bring together the powerless with the powerful; to use power to empower the youth. Dr. Mandela believed in the power to give people hope. He believed in the using of power to heal, not to kill or to steal. Dr. Mandela believed in the power of peace. He believed in the power of goodness and reconciliation: in the power to create a rainbow nation.

In the Holy Gospel of John chapter 15 verse 5, our Lord tells us that without Him we can do nothing. There is not going to be another apartheid again but definitely there are going to be serious and complicated problems waiting this present generation. But He, our Mighty Lord, who gave the strength to Madiba through his long journey, will prepare more Madibas who arise for the present and future generations and who will emancipate their people from the hidden challenges that await them.

May the Almighty God give an eternal rest to the soul of Dr. Nelson Mandela!

May the Almighty God comfort our loss and give us the strength at this difficult time!

God Bless South Africa!

God Bless Africa!

His Grace Abune Yacob, Archbishop of All Africa, Diocese for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Vice-President of the All African Conference of Churches (AACCC) in the See of Apostle St. Philip