



NELSON MANDELA (BORN 1918)

Nelson Mandela, one of the most recognizable human rights symbols of the age, is a man whose dedication to the liberties of his people inspires human rights advocates throughout the world. Born in Transkei, South Africa, son of a tribal chief, Mandela received a university degree and law degree. In 1944, he joined the African National Congress (ANC) and actively worked to abolish the apartheid policies of the ruling National Party. On trial for his actions, Mandela declared, “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”



Sentenced to life imprisonment, Mandela became a powerful symbol of resistance for the rising anti-apartheid movement, repeatedly refusing to compromise his political position to obtain his freedom. Finally released in February 1990, he intensified the battle against oppression to attain the goals he and others had set almost four decades earlier. In May 1994, Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa’s first black president, a position he held until 1999. He presided over the transition from minority rule and apartheid, winning international respect for his advocacy of national and international reconciliation. A worldwide celebration of his life and rededication to his goals of freedom and equality took place on his 90th birthday in 2008.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

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