

On the Passing of Former South African President Nelson Mandela

December 2013

In Memory of Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)

I extend my heartfelt condolences upon the passing of former South African President Nelson Mandela. Mr. Mandela was a lion of humanitarian causes and human rights who inspired hope and courage in the hearts of those around the world victimized by conflict, racism and injustice.

His smile was like a refreshing spring breeze. To know that I will never see that smile again fills my heart with grief. I am convinced that his unwavering and passionate stance calling for a world that respects the dignity of all people will eternally shine as a guiding star for humankind. He was a great man whose vision penetrated the core of injustice, through which both the oppressed and the oppressors were deprived of their humanity. He stated: "I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination." I believe it was the strength of his lofty character that enabled him to realize a new era of harmony.

Mr. Mandela, more than anyone, loved young people and valued the power of education. He was focused on these concerns above all when I met him for the first time in 1990 in Tokyo, soon after his release from prison, and again when we met in 1995.

He once said, "[My country's] greatest wealth is its people, finer and truer than the purest diamonds." With his words in my heart, I am determined to further develop a solidarity of the people, working together with the youth who will shoulder the future, to construct a century of peace and creative coexistence.

Daisaku Ikeda
President, Soka Gakkai International

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda met Nelson Mandela twice in Tokyo, first in October 1990, the year of his release, when he visited Japan as vice president of the African National Congress (ANC), and in 1995 as President of South Africa. During his imprisonment, Mr. Mandela had encountered some writings on the power of youth by Mr. Ikeda.

In his first meeting with Mr. Mandela, Mr. Ikeda proposed several initiatives, including an antiapartheid exhibition that toured Japan, an international exhibition on human rights, and various cultural exchange programs between Japan and South Africa. These activities became the starting point for SGI's ongoing activities in the field of human rights education.