

16 June 1999

Excellency,

It is my great honour to convey my warmest and most heartfelt greetings on the occasion of your retirement from office as President of South Africa. As you move on to the life of rest and reflection you so richly deserve, you will leave behind a legacy matched by few men in history. It is a legacy that honours all mankind, but Africa and its peoples in particular. In your life and through your struggle we all found hope for the future, pride in our identity and dignity in our own efforts to make our continent worthy of its history.

Even today, five years after the end of apartheid, no citizen of the world can remain unmoved by the magnitude and depth of your achievement. By ending apartheid in South Africa, you won a victory for all mankind. And by creating democracy in South Africa, you made that victory a lasting one for all your people. This is, perhaps, the most significant part of your legacy. You knew that it would not be enough to defeat the evil of apartheid, once and for all. You knew that something had to be created as well, a political and social order in which all South Africans, regardless of race, could prosper and contribute to the future of their nation. In what can only be called "Madiba's miracle", you have achieved what you called, on that fateful day 35 years ago in a Pretoria courtroom, your "cherished ideal" of "a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities."

The path of peace, reconciliation and equality that you forged for the people of South Africa is a model for every nation, and all peoples. The principles and values at the heart of your struggle are universal: human rights, co-existence, democracy and development. By bringing these principles to life in South Africa, you have forged a path for the entire United Nations to follow. We are, all of us, in your debt.

Kofi A. Annan

Mr. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela  
President of the Republic of South Africa  
Pretoria