

## **Furor over Mandela's passing**

### **Irony or Hypocrisy?**

The excitement and eulogies have been unprecedented and passionate following former President Nelson Mandela's passing at age 95. True, there are millions who will truly miss Mandela on account of his unconquerable spirit, self-sacrificial ideals, inspiration and credibility as leader and revolutionary. Then again, there are those whose veneration of Mandela suggests little more than an effort to be counted among reputable supporters of the freedom fighter. After all, failing to do so would not be politically astute considering the man's vast and growing popularity. Who wants to be left out and cited as the oddball that failed to honor Mandela? But, in life, was Mandela truly as loved as many seem to suggest in death? Not likely. If he were that loved, he wouldn't have spent 27 years in jail. Looking back at the fate of ex-leaders like Muammar Gaddafi and Manuel Noriega, the ability to carry out decisive action in order to accelerate a desired goal is not unusual or impossible for world powers. 27 years is an unjustifiably long time.

Evidence of genuine admiration for Mandela lies in the extent to which we imitate or at least portray the principles that he stood for. Attendees at his funeral service included some of Africa's most callous despots whose self-seeking ideals continue to destroy millions of lives. The list is rather too long; so, let us acknowledge just a handful: Robert Mugabe, Yoweri Museveni, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mbasogo, Joseph Kabila and Manuel Vicente (representing José Eduardo dos Santos). If they were more principled, perhaps they would have been too ashamed to show up at Mandela's funeral, considering how their disregard for the welfare of their own people digresses sharply from Mandela's commitment to equity and justice. South Africans booed their own president, Jacob Zuma, a clear indication that he is the antithesis of Mandela. Is it that South Africans are courteous or simply didn't know enough about the other glorified thugs at the memorial service? Otherwise, how does one explain their decision not to boo them as well?

But beyond African leaders, the presence of dignitaries whose countries were more concerned about the well-being of their racial South African brethren than they were about justice for Mandela and his people, was as absurd as it was twofaced. Was Mandela not officially touted as a terrorist in the US because he was a member of the African National Congress (ANC)? Attendance by people like Tony Blair and George W. Bush therefore advances the aura of hypocrisy surrounding global lamentation over

Mandela's death. One has to reflect on their role in the slaughter of thousands of innocent Iraqis, a ruthless demonstration of the type of cruelty that Mandela condemned.

However, it would be inadequate to merely point fingers at world leaders and people of celebrity status. While we may think we are not like them, we are only dissimilar in terms of access to power, influence and, perhaps, wealth. Essentially, if some of them have no business mourning Mandela because they are devoid of his spirit, the same rule applies to the rest of us as power abuse manifests on a variety of other levels. Think about the man who beats the crap out of his wife, the rapist, the pedophile, the pastor who steals from his or her congregation, the bribe giver and taker, the politician that rigs his/her way into power and the cohorts that support them. There is more: the landlord defrauding his/her tenants, the professor threatening and jumping into bed with his students, the coward that looks the other way when improprieties are committed in the workplace and the sadist that defines the mutilation of a toddler's vagina as *culture*.

The scenarios are endless but the key is to look in the mirror and carry out sincere, uninhibited self-assessment. Until this is done and we engage in a process of self-cleansing, latching on to favored personalities and identifying with them would amount to little more than deception and a cheap method of assuaging ourselves of guilt. To truly mourn Mandela, there must be a tireless and concerted effort to be like Mandela and to put into practice the things he stood for, whether on a national, professional or personal level.