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Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP)

December 6, 2013

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The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) sends its condolences to the families of Nelson "Madiba" Mandela and the people of South Africa for the passing away the great leader.

For us, Nelson Mandela exemplified courage and perseverance, a humane and democratic vision, tenacity and pan Africanism, reconciliation and loyalty to his cause for which he had said from the start he was ready to die. Mandela passed 27 hard years in prison (18 of them in the notorious Robben's Island) but never gave up his fight, he did not knuckle under apartheid regime despite all that cruel system tried to break his will and stain his soul. A man of immense courage, Mandela, as he often said, joined millions of other South Africans, leaders of his generation, the martyrs of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), the PAC, the Steve Bikos and youngsters who resisted apartheid and brought its downfall. It is to be remembered that the Western powers backed and supported apartheid and Mandela was also called a terrorist and condemned by most of them till the tide turned.

The leaders and members of the Ethiopian Student Movement who later became part and parcel of the EPRP grew up with the struggle of South Africa, demonstrating against apartheid and Ian Smith's "Rhodesia" UDI. The regime at the time forbade such demonstrations at the same time as it brought Mandela for military training in Ethiopia. The official relations of the EPRP with the ANC/PAC, ZANU/ZAPU, SWAPO, PAIGC, FRELIMO, MPLA etc. were forged in the early seventies especially in Algiers. The EPRP has never ceased to express its solidarity to the struggle of the South Africans even when it did not see eye to eye with the ANC on ideological and alliance matters. And yet, Mandela was an African figure for all and for all that time. He remained a man of humility and principle even after becoming president, condemning the invasion of Iraq, the sad plight of the people in the Niger Delta, the murder of Ken Siro-Wawa, and standing firmly for justice and democracy and more.

- 1 -

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Nelson Mandela joined the ANC in the early forties (the ANC was established in 1912), was arrested and jailed in 1956 on treason charges. We remember the Sharpeville massacre that eventually led to the Soweto uprising and the eventual release of Mandela himself and his becoming president by 1994. A long and arduous struggle that called for immense individual sacrifice and Mandela, along with the people of South Africa, endured it and came out victorious. Present day South Africa with its serious social, economic and political difficulties, with its xenophobia against Africans (Ethiopians included), with workers' protests and killings, corruption and crime can hopefully learn from and cherish the wisdom of Nelson Mandela to be a beacon of democracy and pan Africanism. The struggle was not easy, it is not easy. Powerful figures like Ronald Reagan, (then Senator) Dick Cheney and Margaret Thatcher, German and France, etc. backed apartheid, opposed the liberation of Mandela and called the ANC and Mandela terrorists. For that matter, America kept Mandela on its terror watch list till 2008. Mandela was asked to renounce "violence and armed struggle" and to be released but he had resisted this to the end. The ANC suspended unilaterally armed struggle in 1990 but the MK was disbanded only in December 1994. Mandela is thus a continuing symbol of commitment, courage, persistence and loyalty to the cause of the people. An example for all indeed when such bravery is so lacking in our continent.

The EPRP has been struggling for the dignity of Ethiopians, for democracy and Ethiopia's sovereignty for the past 41 years. Thousands have been sacrificed, massacred and murdered by a brutal regime and a vicious mass murder campaign called the Red Terror, thousands have been tortured and mutilated, exiled and still many more disappeared by the past and the present ethnic discriminatory regime that has borrowed its political blueprint from the apartheid's Bantustan policy and from Mussolini's anti Ethiopian divisive plan. That is why the EPRP fondly remembers Nelson Mandela and continues the struggle as it has, like Mandela and the people of South Africa, an ideal it holds on to and a cause worth dying for.

Africa, plagued by brutal dictators, is honored and lucky to have had a democratic leader and a symbol of dignity and struggle like Nelson Mandela.

Rest in peace the man of the people, Nelson Mandela!

- 2 -

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