Address by the Minister of Science and Technology, Naledi Pandor MP, at the Nelson Mandela anniversary tribute exhibition, Nelson Mandela Foundation, Johannesburg, Thursday, 4 December 2014, 17.30

Mr Sello Hatang, Chief Executive, Nelson Mandela Foundation,
Professor Njabulo Ndebele, Chairman, Nelson Mandela Foundation
Distinguished guests

As we remember President Mandela, a year after his passing, it's difficult to claim him as our own in the face of the global acclamation of his contribution to the world as a politician and a person.

In President Obama's words: "To the people of South Africa – people of every race and walk of life – the world thanks you for sharing Nelson Mandela with us. His struggle was your struggle. His triumph was your triumph. Your dignity and hope found expression in his life, and your freedom, your democracy is his cherished legacy."

But claim him we must. He laid the foundation for a new society in South Africa free of the racial divisions of the past and full of hope for the future.

The visual tribute we have just seen reflects the key values of Nelson Mandela’s life and work: respect, reconciliation, and dignity. These are not the values that Madiba proclaimed from the rooftops, but the values that we can discern in his life, his work and his personal conduct.
President Mandela understood that patterns of behaviour are not accidental products of nature, but are acquired through social interaction and nurturing. As he observed, "One of the most powerful ways of children and young adults acquiring values is to see individuals they admire and respect exemplify those values in their own being and conduct. Parents and educators or politicians or priests who say one thing and do another send mixed messages to those in their charge who then learn not to trust them. The question of leadership … is therefore of vital importance."

President Mandela will always be known as a leader who played a key role of sacrifice, struggle and commitment in the fight against apartheid.

He said, on his release from prison: "I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands."

He is the leader who chose reconciliation over revenge. He is a leader whose moral courage defined our era of liberation, so much so that our history books are define the period of our freedom as the "Age of Mandela".

Mandela led without bitterness. He was willing to reconcile. He put South Africa and its people first. In President Clinton's words: "He taught us the freedom of forgiveness and the power of humility".
President Mandela built our nation through forgiveness, persuasion, and love.

It was great, selfless leadership. He said of his commitment to the struggle against apartheid and for freedom: “We all did so not for any personal gain or material rewards. We took this stand because these were goals we saw as worthy and virtuous.”

But President Mandela was no saint. His life and work should be examined, critically assessed and interrogated. The black American philosopher, Cornel West, reminded us in 2006 that we should not “make Nelson Mandela some kind of icon on a pedestal belonging to a museum. He is a wave in an ocean, part of a rich tradition that raises certain kinds of questions, beginning with our own lives and our willingness to muster the courage to examine who we are as humans.”

President Mandela was born in and of the struggle. As he once famously proclaimed, “The struggle is my life”. He was the product of the liberation movement, tempered by a culture of criticism and dialogue and hardened by the responsibilities of the movement and the accountability of leadership. Oliver Tambo wrote to Mandela when it became clear in exile that Mandela had initiated contact with the National Party in the midst of the turbulent 1980s, demanding: “You are answerable, Nelson. We want to know what your reasons are for talking with the ‘boers’”.

It is this tradition of openness, debate, and dialogue that produced the likes of Albert Luthuli, Lilian Ngoyi, Ruth First,
Walter Sisulu, Albertina Sisulu and many others who served the African National Congress.

Sing with me (the song written during Mandela's incarceration as a call for his freedom)

Asimbonanga [we have not seen him]
Asimbonang' uMandela thina [we have not seen Mandela]
Laph'ekhona [in the place where he is]
Laph'ehleli khona [in the place where he is kept]

Asimbonanga
Asimbonang 'umfowethu thina [we have not seen our brother]
Laph'ekhona [in the place where he is]
Laph'wafela khona [in the place where he died]
Sithi: Hey, wena [We say: hey, you]
Hey, wena nawe [Hey, you and you]
Siyofika nini la' siyakhona [when will we arrive at our destination]