

Obama Thrills Crowd As He Honors Mandela

Tens Of Thousands Brave Weather To Attend Service

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Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — U.S. President Barack Obama exhorted the world Tuesday to embrace Nelson Mandela's universal message of peace and justice, electrifying tens of thousands of rain-lashed spectators and prompting a standing ovation by scores of heads of state in a South African stadium.

In a speech that received thunderous applause, Obama urged people to apply the lessons of Mandela, who emerged from 27 years in prison under a racist regime, embraced his enemies when he finally walked to freedom and promoted forgiveness and reconciliation in South Africa.

"We, too, must act on behalf of justice. We, too, must act on behalf of peace," said Obama, who like Mandela became the first black president of his country. Obama said that when he was a student, Mandela "woke me up to my responsibilities — to others, and to myself — and set me on an improbable journey that finds me here today."

Police were expecting a crushing crowd at FNB stadium and had set up overflow points with big screen TVs, but the foul weather and public transportation problems kept many people away. The 95,000-capacity stadium was only two-thirds full.

Addressing the memorial service for Mandela, who died Thursday at age 95, Obama pointed out that "around the world today, men and women are still imprisoned for their political beliefs; and are still persecuted for what they look like, or how they worship, or who they love."

Among the nearly 100 heads of state and government were some from countries like Cuba that don't hold fully democratic elections. On the way to the podium, Obama shook hands with Cuban President Raul Castro, underscoring a recent warming of relations between Cuba and the U.S.

In contrast to the wild applause given to Obama, South African President Jacob Zuma was booed. Many South Africans are unhappy with Zuma because of state corruption scandals, though his ruling African National Congress, once led by Mandela, remains the front-runner ahead of elections next year.

Some of the dozens of trains reserved to ferry people to the stadium in Soweto, a township which revolted in 1976 against



GRAEME WILLIAMS/ACTION PRESS/ZUMA PRESS/MCT
A poster of Nelson Mandela is seen in the crowd during a memorial service for the deceased South African anti-apartheid leader and former President at the FNB Stadium in Soweto, South Africa, on Tuesday.

white rule, were delayed due to a power failure. A Metrorail services spokeswoman, Lilian Mofokeng, said more than 30,000 mourners were successfully transported by train.

The mood was celebratory. A dazzling mix of royalty, statesmen and celebrities was in attendance.

Thabo Mbeki, the former South African president who succeeded Mandela, gave a rousing cheer as he entered the stands. French President Francois Hollande and his predecessor and rival, Nicolas Sarkozy, arrived together. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon waved and bowed to spectators who sang praise for Mandela, seen by many South Africans as the father of the nation.

"I would not have the life I have today if it was not for him," said Mathogonolo Mothoagae, a postgraduate marketing student who arrived hours before the stadium gates opened. "He was jailed so we could have our freedom."

Rohan Laird, the 54-year-old CEO of a health insurance company, said in the stadium that he grew up during white rule in a "privileged position" as a white South African and that Mandela helped whites work through a burden of guilt.

"His reconciliation allowed whites to be released themselves," Laird said. "I honestly don't think the world will see another leader like Nelson Mandela."

Workers were still welding at a VIP

area as the first spectators arrived amid an enormous logistical challenge of organizing the memorial for Mandela, who died Dec. 5 in his Johannesburg home at the age of 95.

Mandela's widow, Graca Machel, and former wife Winnie Madikizela-Mandela were at the stadium, and gave each other a long hug before the ceremonies began. So were actress Charlize Theron, model Naomi Campbell and singer Bono.

Tuesday was the 20th anniversary of the day when Mandela and South Africa's last apartheid-era president, F.W. de Klerk, received the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to bring peace to their country. De Klerk, a political rival who became friends with Mandela, was also in the stadium.

Mandela said in his Nobel acceptance speech at the time: "We live with the hope that as she battles to remake herself, South Africa will be like a microcosm of the new world that is striving to be born."

The sounds of horns and cheering filled the stadium. The rain was seen as a blessing among many of South Africa's majority black population.

"In our culture the rain is a blessing," said Harry Tshabalala, a driver for the justice ministry. "Only great, great people are memorialized with it. Rain is life. This is perfect weather for us on this occasion."



ZHANG CHEN/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS/MCT
U.S. President Barack Obama speaks during the memorial service Tuesday for Nelson Mandela at the FNB Stadium in Soweto, South Africa. Tens of thousands of South Africans have joined dozens of world leaders for the national memorial service for the former President.

Obama: Make Mandela's Life Work Your Own

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Celebrating one of his personal heroes, President Barack Obama praised Nelson Mandela as the last great liberator of the 20th century, urging the world to carry on his legacy by fighting inequality, poverty and discrimination.

At a memorial service in Johannesburg, Obama compared the former South African President to Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln.

"Nothing he achieved was inevitable," Obama said. "In the arc of his life, we see a man who earned his place in history through struggle and shrewdness, persistence and faith. He tells us what's possible not just in the pages of dusty history books, but in our own lives as well."

The crowd at the half-filled stadium erupted in applause each time Obama's name was mentioned or his image was shown on the screen. Dozens gathered below the box seats where Obama and other U.S. presidents sat, waving and snapping pictures of the leaders.

Calling himself a beneficiary of Mandela's struggle, Obama traced the influence that Mandela's story has had on his own life, disclosing that he asks himself how well he's applied Mandela's lessons to himself as a man and as president.

Extolling Mandela as practical but unyielding on his core principles, Obama said it was because Mandela could admit to being imperfect that the world loved him and continues to learn so much from his example. "He was not a bust made of marble. He was a man of flesh and blood," Obama said.

He said Mandela had changed both laws and hearts, inspiring those around him by reconciling with the jailers who kept him prisoner for 27 years. In trusting others despite the injustices he suffered, Mandela showed that the cruelty of the past must be confronted with truth, generosity and inclusion, Obama said.

"We will never see the likes of Nelson Mandela again," Obama said. "But let me say to the people of Africa, and young people around the world: You can make his life's work your own."