



SOUTH CENTRE

**Statement by
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Mandela's Legacy in Social Development and Public Health

The South Centre is greatly pleased to join the international community and the people of South Africa in this historical Nelson Mandela Peace Summit. This is a memorable event in the year of celebrations of the centenary of the birth of the founding father of the South African nation, and a giant of humanity.

My remarks are centred on Mandela's contribution to social development as he battled the unjust legal system of apartheid. They also refer to one of so many examples of his capacity to listen to and address the problems of the people, particularly the poor.

Mr. Mandela's fight against oppression, poverty and for social justice is an example for all of us. Mandela's legacy remains a strong source of inspiration for all people. He taught us to be strong in our beliefs and committed to our cause, to respect, to forgive and to make peace. He was an icon in the fight for freedom, for social justice and a dignified life, which all human beings are equally entitled to have but, because of greed and power, many are still condemned to a life of suffering and poverty. The struggle for peace, justice and equality which Mandela taught us remains a source of inspiration for all of us.

South Africa's progress in social development since the end of apartheid is unmistakable. Apartheid was the main obstacle to such development. It was the system that normalized and enforced discrimination against non-white South Africans in education, health, decent work, income earning assets, and a dignified life. Such a legal system condemned non-whites to a life of poverty and vulnerability.

Mandela, leading the ANC, overturned this system to ensure that all South Africans will be treated equally under the law and that all forms of discrimination ended. It is impossible to imagine the UN community arriving at an agreement on Transforming Our World in September 2015 if apartheid were still reigning in South Africa.

I now turn to an example of Mandela's sensitivity for the suffering of the people, especially the poor.

In an interview in April 2001, Mandela, then a private citizen after serving as South Africa's president, spoke forthrightly against the action by thirty-nine multinational pharmaceutical companies that had taken the government to court over its decision to utilize the flexibilities allowed under WTO rules to foster access to medicines to fight the HIV-AIDS epidemics. At that time, official figures showed that one in nine South Africans was infected with HIV or already had AIDS and only a tiny minority of those 4.7m people could afford appropriate drugs.

Mandela said: "I think the pharmaceuticals are exploiting the situation that exists in countries like South Africa - in the developing world - because they charge exorbitant prices which are beyond the capacity of the ordinary HIV/Aids person. That is completely wrong and must be condemned." Mandela joined the voice of those who claimed that the government's action was necessary and fully legitimate: "the government is perfectly entitled, in facing that situation, to resort to generic drugs and it is a gross error for the companies, for the pharmaceuticals, to take the government to court."

Mr. Mandela's intervention contributed to the mounting pressure on multinational pharmaceutical firms to abide by the internationally agreed patent rules and to abandon their attempts to further expand patent rights in the developing world. His intervention represented a strong ethical call to subordinate commercial interests to the right to health.

As a think tank of developing countries working on multilateral affairs, we are indebted to Nelson Mandela. He was a strong supporter of the South Centre. In his address at the opening session of the South Centre's Council of Representatives meeting held in 1998 at the UN in New York, said that and I quote: "As the premier source of research on issues affecting the South, and growing out of the work and experience of the South Commission, the (South) Centre plays a role whose value for the developing world cannot be underestimated. "

In recognizing the work and value of the South Centre as a research institution of the South, he also paid a tribute to another great son of Africa and his good friend, the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the founding father of the South Commission, which led to the establishment of the South Centre, the intergovernmental organization of developing countries.

The work and legacy of two of the greatest sons of Africa remain the driving forces in our daily work to support the efforts of developing countries to reach an inclusive and sustainable development.