

La morte di Nelson Mandela

Filippo Bovo

Sono le ore 20.50 del 5 dicembre quando Nelson Mandela si spegne nella sua residenza privata di Johannesburg. Il primo a darle l'annuncio, senza reprimere le lacrime, è l'attuale presidente sudafricano Jacob Zuma.

Già lo scorso 4 luglio una fuga di notizie l'aveva dato come in stato vegetativo permanente, ma la cosa era stata successivamente smentita dalla famiglia e dalle autorità sudafricane. Anzi, ad un certo punto era persino parso che le condizioni dell'anziano leader, ormai novantacinquenne, fossero in via di miglioramento.

La sua è la storia d'un eterno ribelle, predestinato ad esser tale sin dalla più tenera età, al pari d'altri grandi leader del Novecento coi quali non a caso ha sempre condiviso amicizia ed unità d'azione. Ed infatti era solito dire: *“Ho tre amici nel mondo, e sono Yasser Arafat, Muammar Gheddafi e Fidel Castro”*. Gli unici, insieme a pochi altri, a sostenerlo per davvero nei lunghi anni della prigionia e a dare un supporto non solo verbale ma anche materiale all'ANC impegnato in una dura lotta contro il regime segregazionista di Pretoria. Ed in particolare sul leader libico, uno dei più generosi finanziatori dell'ANC, Mandela ebbe modo di dire: *“Nessuno Stato può arrogarsi il ruolo di gendarme del mondo, e nessuno Stato può ordinare agli altri quello che devono fare. Quelli che ieri erano gli amici dei nostri nemici, hanno oggi la faccia tosta di propormi di non visitare il mio fratello Gheddafi, ci consigliano di essere ingrati e di dimenticare i nostri amici di ieri”*; e ancora: *“Coloro che si sentono irritati dalla nostra amicizia con il Presidente Gheddafi possono andare a fare un tuffo in piscina”*. Tre amicizie importanti, quelle con Arafat, Castro e Gheddafi, che oggi i media impegnati nel celebrare Mandela dipingendolo come un leader imbelle ed amico dell'Occidente occultano accuratamente.

Nel 1941, a soli 22 anni, si ribella al matrimonio combinato impostogli dal suo capotribù ed insieme ad un suo cugino fugge a Johannesburg. Iscrittosi alla facoltà di legge, entra a contatto con gli ambienti politici che s'oppongono al regime sudafricano per unirsi, già nel 1942, all'*African National Congress*. Due anni dopo fonderà, insieme ad altre grandi personalità come Walter Sisulu e Oliver Tambo, la *Youth League*. Proprio con Tambo darà vita ad uno studio legale che offrirà protezione legale gratuita o a basso costo a molti neri, in quelli che sono forse gli anni più neri dell'*apartheid*, quelli successivi alla vittoria del Partito Nazionale nel 1948. Una storia che ricorda molto da vicino quella d'un altro giovane avvocato che proprio in quegli stessi anni sta iniziando a muovere i suoi primi passi come rivoluzionario e col quale Mandela svilupperà in futuro una già menzionata e profonda amicizia: Fidel Castro.

Arrestato il 5 dicembre 1956 con l'accusa di tradimento, viene assolto dopo un lungo e tormentato processo nel 1961. Nel frattempo, nel 1960, le autorità sudafricane hanno messo al bando l'ANC e gli altri movimenti contrari all'*apartheid*, a seguito del massacro dei manifestanti disarmati di Sharpeville. A Mandela e ai suoi compagni non rimane altra strada da percorrere che quella della lotta armata.

Subito dopo la fine del processo, cofonda l'ala armata dell'ANC, nota come *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Lancia della Nazione) e ne diviene il comandante. Scopo dell'organizzazione è d'abbattere il regime dell'*apartheid* attraverso la guerriglia ed il sabotaggio a danno dell'esercito governativo e di vari obiettivi sensibili, e di raccogliere fondi all'estero, in particolare da altri governi africani rivoluzionari come ad esempio la Guinea di Sekou Tourè o il Ghana di Nkrumah, ma anche dai paesi del campo socialista. Il 5 agosto 1962, quando l'organizzazione ha ormai raggiunto un ottimo livello di strutturazione e radicamento, Mandela viene arrestato dalla polizia sudafricana con l'aiuto

della CIA ed imprigionato per cinque anni con l'accusa di aver compiuto viaggi illegali all'estero e incitato scioperi. Mentre era in detenzione, s'aggiunsero altri reati come il sabotaggio ed il tradimento, e la pena passò da cinque anni all'ergastolo.

Nel 1980 riuscì a far uscire dal carcere, per vie traverse, un manifesto politico indirizzato all'ANC: un aneddoto che ricorda il modo rocambolesco ed avventuroso col quale anni prima Fidel Castro, mentre si trovava in prigionia, era riuscito a far uscire e rendere pubblico il suo discorso ("*La storia m'assolverà*") di difesa pronunciato davanti alla Corte che lo avrebbe condannato. Cinque anni più tardi a Mandela sarà offerta la libertà condizionata in cambio d'una rinuncia alla lotta armata, offerta che rifiuterà sdegnosamente. La sua prigionia proseguirà per altri cinque anni, fino all'11 febbraio 1990, allorchè le crescenti pressioni dell'ANC sul regime sudafricano indebolito anche dalle disastrose disfatte subite in Angola ad opera dei cubani e del MPLA indurranno le autorità a mollare la presa e a revocare il bando per l'ANC. Fu l'allora presidente sudafricano in persona, Frederik Wilelm De Klerk, a ordinare la sua liberazione, costretto a trovare un rimedio alla situazione disastrosa in cui il paese era stato cacciato dai suoi predecessori.

Divenuto nuovamente un libero cittadino ed acclamato presidente dell'ANC, Mandela potrà così partecipare alle elezioni presidenziali contro De Klerk, vincendole (il suo rivale diverrà vicepresidente) e presiedendo alla smobilitazione del vecchio regime. Verrà allo scopo istituito un tribunale speciale, la Commissione per la Verità e la Riconciliazione, che raccoglierà le testimonianze delle vittime dei responsabili dei crimini commessi da ambo le parti sotto l'*apartheid* e le cui udienze saranno trasmesse in televisione. L'ex presidente sudafricano Pieter Willem Botha, forse il più duro perpetratore dell'*apartheid*, si rifiuterà di comparire dinanzi a tale tribunale, a differenza del suo successore De Klerk che addirittura arriverà a scusarsi pubblicamente per le sofferenze causate ai neri dai governi bianchi.

La presidenza di Mandela, durata fino al 1999, non ha ovviamente potuto risolvere tutti i problemi del Sudafrica, frutto di decenni di contraddizioni ed ingiustizie, e men che meno realizzare gli scopi per i quali l'ANC era nato. Ma ha tracciato la strada da seguire, e se oggi il Sudafrica è fra le cinque economie destinate ad affermare e guidare il mondo multipolare (i BRICS) il merito va incontestabilmente a lui.

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Remembering Nelson Mandela's Extraordinary Legacy

"All of us need to do more in supporting the struggle of the people of Palestine for self-determination; in supporting the quest for peace, security and friendship in this region" – Nelson Mandela

As we remember our hero Nelson Mandela who passed away yesterday at the age of 95, we too are reflecting on his extraordinary legacy. Having suffered under the wrath of oppression as a political prisoner for 27 years, he emerged with unwavering conviction and extraordinarily, with genuine reconciliation. In his historic speech as President of South Africa at the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in 1997, he reminded us that "the temptation in our situation is to speak in muffled tones about an issue such as the right of the people of Palestine to a state of their own...yet we would be less than human if we did so." Having defeated the abhorrent system of apartheid in South Africa, he chose to lead his country, but also continue the struggle for human rights worldwide. Like the rest of the world, we mourn the loss of this great man.

The above picture of Nelson Mandela and Yasser Arafat hangs at AAI and is signed by both men. The Nelson Mandela quote from 1990 reads: "There are many similarities between our struggle and that of the PLO. We live under a unique form of colonialism in South Africa, as well as in Israel..."

Read the full address by President Nelson Mandela at the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People [here](#).

Below, in an article for [Huffington Post](#), AAI President Jim Zogby gives the backstory on the photo.

Mandela and Arafat

In late February of 1990, just two weeks after being released from prison, Nelson Mandela met with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat. Afterwards Mandela spoke publicly of his affinity with the Palestinian people and his support for their struggle. He described the parallels between the two peoples' struggles for justice, saying in part.

"There are many similarities between our struggle and that of the PLO. We live under a unique form of colonialism in South Africa, as well as in Israel..."

That was 1990, when it was taboo in the U.S. to have any contact with the PLO. Because Americans had a double standard when it came to addressing Palestinian rights and/or had been cowed into silence about Israeli behavior, many were shocked that Mandela would not only praise the PLO but would also compare the Palestinian struggle against colonization and occupation with the campaign against apartheid. But Mandela would not be silenced. The man stood firm reminding those who questioned him that the PLO had always been an ally of his African National Congress (ANC), while Israel had been an ally and arms' supplier to the South African apartheid regime. At one point he said "Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." For supporters of Palestinian rights, all of this was exhilarating and validating.

I was so moved by Mandela's courage and his commitment to speak the truth about Palestinians that I made a poster commemorating the Mandela-Arafat embrace including an excerpt of his words.

I met Nelson Mandela a few times. On one occasion, he told me how thankful he continued to be for the early support Algeria and Egypt had provided to the ANC and to him personally. On another, in 1991, I remembered to bring a copy of the poster and asked him to sign it. He looked at it, smiled and said about Arafat "he is a friend and a good man."

Four years later I remembered to bring the poster to Arafat asking him to sign it.

That poster has hung in my office for more than two decades as a reminder of the real Mandela -- the brave and always honest fighter for justice and of his strong support for the Palestinian people.

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Author : Nelson Mandela

Address by President Nelson Mandela at the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

4 December 1997, Pretoria

Mr. Chairman;
Mr. Suleyman al-Najab,
Special Emissary of President Yasser Arafat;
Members of the diplomatic corps;
Distinguished Guests,

We have assembled once again as South Africans, our Palestinian guests and as humanists to express our solidarity with the people of Palestine.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers of the event, particularly the United Nations Information Centre and the UNISA Centre for Arabic and Islamic Studies for this magnificent act of compassion, to keep the flames of solidarity, justice and freedom burning.

The temptation in our situation is to speak in muffled tones about an issue such as the right of the people of Palestine to a state of their own. We can easily be enticed to read reconciliation and fairness as meaning parity between justice and injustice. Having achieved our own freedom, we can fall into the trap of washing our hands of difficulties that others faces.

Yet we would be less than human if we did so.

It behoves all South Africans, themselves erstwhile beneficiaries of generous international support, to stand up and be counted among those contributing actively to the cause of freedom and justice.

Even during the days of negotiations, our own experience taught us that the pursuit of human fraternity and equality - irrespective of race or religion - should stand at the centre of our peaceful endeavours. The choice is not between freedom and justice, on the one hand, and their opposite, on the other. Peace and prosperity; tranquility and security are only possible if these are enjoyed by all without discrimination.

It is in this spirit that I have come to join you today to add our own voice to the universal call for Palestinian self-determination and statehood.

We would be beneath our own reason for existence as government and as a nation, if the resolution of the problems of the Middle East did not feature prominently on our agenda.

When in 1977, the United Nations passed the resolution inaugurating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, it was asserting the recognition that injustice and gross

human rights violations were being perpetrated in Palestine. In the same period, the UN took a strong stand against apartheid; and over the years, an international consensus was built, which helped to bring an end to this iniquitous system.

But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians; without the resolution of conflicts in East Timor, the Sudan and other parts of the world.

We are proud as a government, and as the overwhelming majority of South Africans to be part of an international consensus taking root that the time has come to resolve the problems of Palestine.

Indeed, all of us marvelled at the progress made a few years ago, with the adoption of the Oslo Agreements. Leaders of vision, who saw problems not merely from the point of view of their own narrow constituency, had at least found a workable approach towards friendship and peaceful co-existence in the Middle East.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to these Palestinian and Israeli leaders. In particular, we pay homage to the memory of Yitshak Rabin who paid the supreme sacrifice in pursuit of peace.

We are proud as humanists, that the international consensus on the need for the implementation of the Oslo Agreements is finding expression in the efforts of the multitude of Israeli and Palestinian citizens of goodwill who are marching together, campaigning together, for an end to prevarication. These soldiers of peace are indeed sending a message to us all, that the day is not far off, when Palestinian and Jewish children will enjoy the gay abandon of children of God in a peaceful and prosperous region.

These soldiers of peace recognise that the world we live in is rising above the trappings of religious and racial hatred and conflict. They recognise that the spurning of agreements reached in good faith and the forceful occupation of land can only fan the flames of conflict. They know from their own experience that, it is in a situation such as this, that extremists on all sides thrive, fed by the blood lust of centuries gone by.

These Palestinian and Israeli campaigners for peace know that security for any nation is not abstract; neither is it exclusive. It depends on the security of others; it depends on mutual respect and trust. Indeed, these soldiers of peace know that their destiny is bound together, and that none can be at peace while others wallow in poverty and insecurity.

Thus, in extending our hands across the miles to the people of Palestine, we do so in the full knowledge that we are part of a humanity that is at one, that the time has come for progress in the implementation of agreements. The majority of the world community; the majority of the people of the Middle East; the majority of Israelis and Palestinians are suing for peace.

But we know, Mr. Chairman, that all of us need to do much much more to ensure that this noble ideal is realised.

As early as February 1995, our government formalised its relations with the State of Palestine when we established full diplomatic relations. We are proud of the modest technical assistance that our government is offering Palestine in such areas as Disaster Management, women`s empowerment

and assistance to handicapped children. But the various discussions with our counterparts in Palestine are an indication that we can do more.

We need to do more as government, as the ANC and other parties, as South Africans of all religious and political persuasions to spur on the peace process. All of us should be as vocal in condemning violence and the violation of human rights in this part of the world as we do with regard to other areas. We need to send a strong message to all concerned that an attempt by anyone to isolate partners in negotiations from their own mass base; and attempt to co-opt them is bound to hurt the peace process as a whole.

We must make our voices heard calling for stronger action by world bodies as well as those states that have the power, to act with the same enthusiasm in dealing with this deadlock as they do on other problems in the Middle East.

Yes, all of us need to do more in supporting the struggle of the people of Palestine for self-determination; in supporting the quest for peace, security and friendship in this region.

But at least we can draw comfort from the fact that, our meeting today is yet another small expression of our empathy.

We hope that, by this humble act, we are strengthening the voice of peace and friendship in Israel and Palestine; so that, as we enter the new millennium, we shall all have taken a giant stride towards a world in which our humanity will be the hallmark of our relations across colour, religious and other divides.

I thank you.