

Nelson Mandela memoriam

Luanda 06 December 2013

At about midnight on Thursday, the 5th of December DW's director Allan Cain was en route to Johannesburg when Nelson Mandela's death was announced on the airport display screens. The following is Allan's reflection on Mandela's passing.

I remember the first and only time I saw Nelson Mandela in May 1990. Shortly after being released from prison, he chose to come to Angola as his first trip abroad. Julia and I and our two children Mathieu and Rebecca walked from home, the short distance to Largo 1 de Maio where he was speaking. I told my 9 year old son that this was a historic event that I hoped he would remember. Mandela thanked Angola for the sacrifices that the country made for supporting the ANC's liberation movement in their fight against the apartheid regime.

Angola suffered greatly since its independence for supporting both the South African and Namibian liberation movements. The South African regime contributed to Angola's destabilization by fuelling the civil war and occupying large areas in the south for several years. Angola provided a safe haven for both Namibian and South African refugees and also had to accommodate many of their own internally displaced persons fleeing the conflict.

Throughout the 1980's Development Workshop provided support for Southern African refugees and worked with both the ANC and SWAPO on building schools and vocational training centres in several Angolan provinces. DW at the same time became increasingly engaged in programs for Angolans fleeing the war-affected provinces and settling in the cities.

Nelson Mandela became South Africa's conciliator and managed to build the basis of a multi-racial "rainbow nation". In the later years of his presidency 1994-1999, he was called upon as Nobel Peace laureate to assist in mediation of other African conflicts. He promoted peacebuilding in Burundi and DR Congo and in January 1997 met the UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi to try to encourage him (unsuccessfully) to join the Angolan Government of National Reconciliation. The following year President Mandela made his first official "State Visit" to Angola in April 1998 to meet President dos Santos to rebuild the relationship with the Angolan Government and to recognize once more the contribution Angola had made to South Africa over the years of conflict.

In the late 1990's Development Workshop engaged in a program of conflict mitigation and mediation. In December 1998, at a time when the ceasefire broke down and Angola returned to armed conflict, DW launched the Angola Peacebuilding Program in partnership with the principal church and civil society institutions. A national peace movement evolved during those years that eventually laid an important platform for post-2002 national reconciliation and sustained peace.

DW is a member of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and ACCORD who's Board of Trustees is chaired by Nelson Mandela's wife Madame Graca Machel. Development Workshop remains committed to those principles of social justice and conflict resolution in our work on land rights, poverty reduction and support for national programs such as "Water for All".