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PRESS RELEASE

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OF THE KWAZULU-NATAL LAW SOCIETY
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ON

THE PASSING AWAY OF A LEGAL GIANT AND THE FATHER OF OUR NATION

The brightness which shines on us as a nation, a continent and the world flickered briefly with the passing away of the former President Nelson Mandela.

As the first President of a democratically elected South Africa, he was the moral compass and the shining beacon of light which guided us in our arduous journey to a fair and just society based on dignity, equality and freedom which are the values which underpin our constitution.

We are proud to record that Mr Mandela was one of us, a dedicated attorney, who was one of the first Black lawyers in our country. He practised at height of apartheid serving the poor, the marginalized and disenfranchised.

It was not unexpected that he would sacrifice his successful practice and legal career for a life of struggle in the fight against White oppression and domination. He was a towering personality who used his intellect and boxing skills in a non-violent and peaceful manner to outwit and outmaneuver his oppressors at every turn. Only when the white minority refused to recognize the legitimate rights and aspirations of his people, the majority, did he lead the armed struggle for a free, democratic, united and non-racial South Africa. His oppressors, an illegitimate regime, used the might of the then unjust laws to sentence him to life imprisonment for treason and incarcerated him in Robben Island, a prison for Africans, Coloureds and Indians, just off the coast of Cape Town.
Mr Mandela and other political prisoners experienced many great hardships in prison but the greatest hardship for him was to learn of firstly, the death of his mother and then the death of his eldest son, Thembekile, who died in a motor vehicle accident. His request to attend the funeral of both his mother and his son was bluntly and shamefully refused.

He was released from prison after 27 years on 11 February 1990. As when he entered prison, he did not waiver in his views and he stood firm and resolute in waging and continuing the struggle against racial oppression and for a free, democratic, united and non-racial South Africa. Surprisingly, he did not show any bitterness and hatred to his enemies and White people in general.

At that time and in absence of liberation movements such as the ANC and PAC who were all banned, saw the birth of the United Democratic Front, a broad based community organization which emerged as the rising force against the apartheid government. The National Association of Democratic Lawyers (Nadel) a non-racial anti-apartheid lawyers body and a member of the UDF was warmly embraced by comrade Mandela and he naturally became the first honorary president of Nadel.

As the first black President of a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa based on constitutional values, Mr Mandela was instrumental in ensuring that through many of his social reforms South Africa became a better place to live in especially for the previously disadvantaged. Most importantly, the dignity of the majority of the people was restored.

In so far as the legal profession is concerned he also initiated legislation to reform the profession, such as the Right of Appearance of Attorneys in the High Court. The Legal Practice Bill which has just been passed by parliament is no doubt one of the great reforms initiated under the presidency and leadership of Mr Mandela to transform the legal profession for the benefit our society.

Let us remember the legacy of Mr Mandela. A man with an amazing smile, full of love but infused with humility. As members of an honorable profession let us actively strive to ensure the legal reforms initiated by the great soul - Mandela and presently on the table becomes a reality. These reforms are meant for the good and benefit of our South African society whether poor or rich and black or white.

His sacrifice against all odds must be a lesson for all of us, the world over. "Everyone is equal, no one, black or white must dominate the one against the other. It must never, never, never again happen".
His life is an unfinished story which he foretold in the following moving narrative:

"I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way, but I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."

As a nation we are obliged to continue with his journey to a society to which we aspire based on unity, equality, dignity and justice for all. We dare not fail that legacy lest history will judge us harshly. We are beholden to give content to these noble precepts.

On behalf of the KZNLS let me express our sincere and profound condolences to the entire Mandela clan including Mama Graca Machel, Mama Winnie Madikizela- Mandela, the children, grand children, great grand children and relatives. Your grief is our grief, your pain is our pain, your loss is our loss. With a heavy heart I say, be comforted in the knowledge that the great soul Mandela is resting in peace in the heavenly abode of God.