

# In the Words of Nelson Mandela

---

Compiled and edited by  
Jennifer Crwys-Williams

**P**  
PROFILE BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2010 by  
PROFILE BOOKS LTD  
3A Exmouth House  
Pine Street  
London EC1R 0JH  
www.profilebooks.com

First published in South Africa by  
Penguin Books Ltd

Copyright © 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays, Bungay, Suffolk

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 84668 447 0



**FSC**

**Mixed Sources**

Product group from well-managed  
forests and other controlled sources

Cert no. SGS-COC-2061

[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

The paper this book is printed on is certified by the © 1996 Forest Stewardship Council A.C. (FSC). It is ancient-forest friendly. The printer holds FSC chain of custody SGS-COC-2061

---

## *Introduction*

**Nelson Mandela** is the world's role model. He has been described as 'the world's last great superhero', 'an icon of forgiveness, compassion, magnanimity and reconciliation for the entire globe', 'a myth', 'an icon of righteousness', and, by Bill Clinton when celebrating his eighty-fifth birthday in July 2003, 'You have taught us the freedom of forgiveness, the futility of coercive power ... and the joy of service.' His wife, Graça Machel, has said pointedly that 'he is a symbol but not a saint'.

However he is described, he has become a towering symbol of reconciliation and sacrifice. Above all, he is perceived as a man who did his duty.

With the reach and might of twenty-first-century communications, the myth of the man sometimes conceals the very real human being who exists beneath the hyperbole. How better, then, to let Nelson Mandela speak for himself in his own unembellished words?

Perhaps his thoughts, reproduced on these pages, and honed over many years of tribulation, will inspire people, young and old, monied and impoverished, the world over.

In particular, I hope it will inspire people who have had few role models in their lives, and who have suffered their own apartheid in their own countries.

*Jennifer Crwys-Williams*

---

*on* abortion

**Women have the right** to decide what they want to do with their bodies.

---

*on* his achievements

**Don't tempt me** to beat my chest and to say this is what I have done!

*In spite of interviewers the world over hoping for intimate revelations, Nelson Mandela dislikes speaking about himself and invariably refers to the 'collective' – meaning, of course, the African National Congress*

**I must not be isolated** from the collective who are responsible for the success.

**When I make a mistake**, I normally say: 'It's these young chaps,' and when they do something good, I say: 'This is the man.'

*To illustrate his point, Madiba beat his chest – this was in an internationally televised interview, December 1997: Mandela Meets the Media*

## *on Africa*

**For centuries**, an ancient continent has bled from many gaping sword wounds.

**No doubt Africa's renaissance** is at hand – and our challenge is to steer the continent through the tide of history.

**The people of the continent** are eager and willing to be among the very best in all areas of endeavour.

**The peoples of resurgent Africa** are perfectly capable of deciding upon their own future form of government and discovering and themselves dealing with any dangers which might arise.

**We need to exert ourselves** that much more, and break out of the vicious cycle of dependence imposed on us by the financially powerful; those in command of immense market power and those who dare to fashion the world in their own image.

**Africa, more than any other continent**, has had to contend with the consequences of conquest in a denial of its own role in history, including the denial that its people had the capacity to bring about change and progress.

**It would be a cruel irony** of history if Africa's actions to regenerate the continent were to

unleash a new scramble for Africa which, like that of the nineteenth century, plundered the continent's wealth and left it once more the poorer.

**Conflict threatens** not only the gains we have made but also our collective future.

**The African rebirth** is now more than an idea – its seeds are being sown in the regional communities we are busy building and in the continent as a whole.

**Can we continue** to tolerate our ancestors being shown as people locked in time?

**Africa yearns and deserves** to redeem her glory, to reassert her centuries-old contribution to economics, politics, culture and the arts; and once more to be a pioneer in the many fields of human endeavour.

**One destabilising conflict** anywhere on the continent is one too many.

**For as long as** the majority of people anywhere on the continent feel oppressed, are not allowed democratic participation in decision-making processes, and cannot elect their own leaders in free and fair elections, there will always be tension and conflict.

**A continent which**, while it led in the very evolution of human life and was a leading centre of learning, technology and the arts in ancient times, has experienced various traumatic epochs, each one of which has pushed her peoples deeper into poverty and backwardness.

**We cannot abuse** the concept of national sovereignty to deny the rest of the continent the right and duty to intervene when, behind those sovereign boundaries, people are being slaughtered to protect tyranny.

*He said this in June 1998 in his address to the Organisation of African Unity*

**We should treat** the question of peace and stability on our continent as a common challenge.

**Africa has long traversed** past a mindset that seeks to heap all blame on the past and on others.

---

## *on* being an African

**Teach the children** that Africans are not one iota inferior to Europeans.

*From his seminal 'No Easy Walk to Freedom' speech, 21 August 1953*



**The lack of human dignity** experienced by Africans is the direct result of the policy of white supremacy.

*Spoken from the dock at the Rivonia Treason Trial, 20 April 1964, which sent him to prison for 27 long years*

**All of us**, descendants of Africa, know only too well that racism demeans the victims and dehumanizes its perpetrators.

**We are rising** from the ashes of war.

*He said this while presenting the Africa Peace Award to the war-torn country of Mozambique in November 1997. Madiba's wife, Graça Machel, is the widow of the former president of that country and he feels a great bond with it*

---

## *on* the African National Congress

**As no man is an island**, so too are we not men of stone who are unmoved by the noble passions of love, friendship and human compassion.

*He was referring to the formation of the ANC Youth League on Easter Sunday, 1944. Mandela and his lifelong friends Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu, were prominent among its founding fathers – the young Turks of their day. This*

*quotation was from a speech made in Uppsala Cathedral, Sweden, in March 1990*

**We must move** from the position of a resistance movement to one of builders.

**For us the struggle** against racism has assumed the proportions of a crusade.

**The African National Congress** is the greatest achievement of the twentieth century.

*From an interview in 1997, the year he relinquished his presidency of the party*

**I have always** been a member of the African National Congress and I will remain a member of the African National Congress until I die.

---

## *on* the African Renaissance

**As we dream** and work for the regeneration of our continent, we remain conscious that the African Renaissance can only succeed as part of the development of a new and equitable world order in which all the formerly colonised and marginalised take their rightful place, makers of history rather than the possessions of others.

**As we stand on the threshold** of a new African era characterised by democracy, sustainable economic development and a re-awakening of our

rich cultural values and heritage, African unity remains our watchword and the Organisation of African Unity our guide.

---

## *on* Afrikaners

**As those who drew benefits** from a previous programme of affirmative action, they should realise better than anyone else how such a programme can contribute towards making the community more productive.

**I have often noticed** Afrikaans people remark that the new South Africa gives them a feeling of freedom now that they have entered a wider world of relationships with fellow South Africans.

**Maybe it was out of fear** that they themselves would one day become the oppressed once again.

*On possible reasons for the Afrikaners oppressing fellow South Africans during apartheid, and spoken in the tense run-up to South Africa's first democratic election in 1994*

**When you speak Afrikaans**, you go straight to their hearts.

**When an Afrikaner changes**, he changes completely.

**Many Afrikaners**, who once acted with great cruelty and insensitivity towards the majority in our country, to an extent you have to go to jail to understand, have changed completely and become loyal South Africans in whom one can trust.

---

*on age*

**What nature has decreed** should not generate undue insecurity.

**I am nearing my end.** I want to be able to sleep until eternity with a broad smile on my face, knowing that the youth, opinion-makers and everybody is stretched across the divide, trying to unite the nation.

*From a speech to students at the University of Potchefstroom, February 1996. He was then 77. Nelson Mandela was born in the tiny Transkei village of Mvezo on 18 July 1918*

**I will be 81** when I finally retire, and I never thought a man in his 70s should take over an organisation like the ANC.

**The autumn of our lives** presages the African spring.

*He said this in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, addressing the Organisation of African Unity.*

*He celebrated his 80th birthday at home in Johannesburg with his family on 18 July 1998*

**One of the advantages** of old age is that people respect you because of your grey hair and say all manner of nice things about you that are not based on who you really are.

**I only keep myself busy** so that I can prove that although I'm a has-been, I've still got some work to do.

*Said in 2002, when he was 84 and as busy as ever*

**To be an old man** is very nice because, as a young man, I didn't get the support I am getting now.

*He recounted the \$10 million given to him by TV talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, and a number of banks whom he phoned at intervals of 15 minutes, raising enough money to send 20 young people to university. The occasion was the launch in Johannesburg, July 2003, of the Mindset Network educational project. Nelson Mandela joked that the first thing he would do when he reached the 'next world' would be to ferret out the billionaires. 'I am going to say to them "raise money" because I know the poor are everywhere and these children need to go to school.'*

## *on aids*

**Aids is clearly a disaster**, effectively wiping out the development gains of the past decades and sabotaging the future.

*Nelson Mandela was closing the 13th International Aids conference in Durban, July 2000, and drew a standing ovation*

**The challenge is to move** from rhetoric to action, and action at an unprecedented intensity and scale.

**There is no shame** to disclose a terminal disease from which you are suffering.

*He said this in 2002, after making a deliberate gesture by publicly embracing HIV-infected Aids activist Zackie Achmat; he also disclosed that three members of his own family had died of Aids. He was criticised by a prominent gay HIV-positive South African judge, Edwin Cameron, for failing to give a message on Aids when he was president. 'In 199 ways, he was our country's saviour. In the 200th way, he was not.'*

**Those who are infected** with this terrible disease do not want stigma, they want love.

*On the fifth anniversary of the death of Britain's Princess Diana (31 August 2002), he paid special tribute to her work in smashing the*