

UPF Netherlands Celebrates Nelson Mandela International Day 2024

Willem Koetsier
July 18, 2024



On July 18, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) Netherlands organized, together with the Church of Scientology, in their chapel, an evening in memory of Nelson Mandela. This meeting took place in the context of the United Nations International Days, in which Mandela's life is commemorated on July 18.

At 7 p.m., Gerbrig Deinum, Public Relations manager of the Church of Scientology and MC for this meeting, welcomed participants to this evening. She then gave a brief introduction to the speakers listed below and announced that in the program some short videos will be shown about human rights and that between the two speakers there will be a musical intermezzo by Hans Campman (piano) and Eleanor Flowers (singing).



The first speaker was Elizabeth Baatenburg de Jong who gave a presentation on theme "Lessons from Mandela's life". Elizabeth was born in Nigeria, was a nurse in England, studied theology in Korea and did missionary work in Africa. Based on the book "Nelson Mandela - about Leadership, Life and Love" by Richard Stengel, she talked about what we can learn from Mandela's life. Elizabeth began with an overview of Mandela's life. He studied law, was associated with the African National Congress (ANC) and the fight against apartheid, spent 27 years in prison and then served as president of South Africa for 5 years.

This was followed by 15 lessons from Mandela's life, based on the book mentioned above. These are about courage, staying calm, visible leadership, leading from the rear, that the first impression is decisive, seeing the good in others, knowing your enemies, keeping an eye on your rivals, adhering to fundamental principles, knowing when to say no, taking someone's entire life into account, that love makes the

difference, that making room for someone else in time also shows leadership, that it is always about more than one point of view and finding your resting place, where you can be yourself. Elizabeth provided an explanation for each of these points, incorporating her own life experiences. She concluded with the conclusion shared in many quarters that Mandela was a man of integrity, humility and a very good leader.



After a musical intermezzo by pianist Hans Campman and singer Eleanor Flowers, Donna Martijn, the second speaker, gave a presentation on the theme "Reconciliation". She is the Founder and Chair of the "Peace and Reconciliation-Together" foundation (PnR-T) which, in the spirit of Mandela, works to restore friendships and relationships by applying a unique formula to achieve reconciliation.



In her speech, Donna highlighted some aspects of Mandela's reconciliation efforts, which PnR-T is trying to implement. On April 20, 1964, Mandela said in the Pretoria High Court:

"During my life I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I've fought against white supremacy, and I've fought against black supremacy. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society, in which all people live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal that I hope to realize, for which I live and am prepared to die."

He maintained this attitude and belief throughout his life. PnR-T recognizes that this universal or divine vision is necessary and that one must envision the best for all peoples and all situations. Mandela provided insight into self-control over emotions such as anger, resentment, hatred, desire to inflict pain, being aggressive or violent, and taking revenge. About this he said: "Resentment is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill your enemies" and further: "The first thing is to be honest with yourself. You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself... Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, honesty and humility."



Donna identified with feeling anger, resentment, and hatred toward people like those of European descent. Thinking of her ancestors, she was haunted by the Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet traditions in the Netherlands and the history of slavery, in which Christians, Jews and Muslims, as well as Africans, played an important role. In response, destructive thoughts came to her mind, but she decided to turn to God about this. The question "Have you taken the time to understand this tradition through the eyes of the people who celebrate Sinterklaas?" came to her and further "You can go on hating and disapproving as long as you want, but what's the use? What do you achieve with this?"

Overcoming negative emotions became a major challenge and struggle, but it became her choice. This helps Donna understand better what Mandela had to go through when he chose the path of reconciliation. He made that clear in his autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom": "We must strive to be moved by a generosity of spirit that will enable us to outgrow the hatred and conflict of the past" and "When I opened the door walked toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I would still be in prison."

Donna noted that only by letting go of his anger could Mandela move on with his life in a truly powerful, purposeful and dignified way and lead South Africa in writing a new chapter in history. Another aspect important to Mandela's attempts at reconciliation is dealing with internal and external conflicts during the process. Both Mandela and the then President of South Africa, Mr. F.W. De Klerk may have had to deal with internal conflicts within their parties. The example of Mandela and De Klerk shows us that we should not give up and at the same time keep our eye on the goal.

A statement from the founder of the Church of Scientology, Mr. L. Ron Hubbard, was cited, "A person lives only as well as he can communicate." Communication was also very important for Mandela in the pursuit of reconciliation, according to Donna. In particular between him and President De Klerk, as well as between the teams of negotiators from both parties. This requires good guidelines and methods, such as active and empathetic listening and ensuring the conversation runs safely. It is not so much about whether someone is right or whether they should agree with each other, but about wanting to understand from the heart what someone wants to say (putting yourself in the other person's shoes). PnR-T pays a lot of attention to this.

"Apology" was mentioned by Donna as another important ingredient in the process of rapprochement between Mandela and De Klerk. According to her, there is no reconciliation without an apology. This requires us to be vulnerable and sometimes put in an uncomfortable position. Then we should not push away these discomforts with denial, or by using half-excuses, or by trying to avoid the problems of the heart. Sometimes fears and insecurities increase and we need education and guidance to help us understand the reasons, value and importance of why we need to overcome these things. The following

statement by Mandela fits with this:

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but the victory over it. The courageous person is not one who does not feel fear, but one who overcomes that fear."



A video was then shown in which former president De Klerk apologized for the apartheid system. Donna thinks that this recovery and reconciliation process has not been easy for President De Klerk: "I have the feeling that he has really contributed to the turning tide of history. Let us also recognize the efforts of President De Klerk and give him a big round of applause."

Then the question was discussed why asking for forgiveness is important. For Donna this shows

that we have reached a level of understanding in our hearts that recognizes that intentional or unintentional harm has been caused that has led to pain. It expresses the desire to work towards healing and repairing this damage.



Donna has personally struggled with the idea of forgiveness because it seemed so one-sided. To her, it felt like someone could do bad things all the time and get away with it cheaply. "As nice as it sounds to forgive your enemy, I couldn't understand it logically. But I've come to understand that forgiveness is more for my benefit, release, and healing, and that forgiving someone does not mean he or she gets away with the wrongdoing. However, when I hold on to the pain and resentment, it is like holding myself captive or chained." The following statements by Mandela illustrate this:

"When a deep wound is done to us, we never heal until we forgive."

"For being free doesn't just mean throwing off your chains, but living in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

"If you want to make peace with your enemy, you must work with your enemy. Then he will become your partner."

A statement by Mr L.R. Hubbard was put forward in this context:

"Loving in spite of everything is the secret of greatness. And perhaps the greatest secret in the universe."

The meeting ended with a reconciliation ceremony. Two people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds came together, with each apologizing to the other for his or her ancestors' bad deeds and then forgiving the other. Three such instances of forgiveness took place during the ceremony.