

UPF Buenos Aires, Argentina marks the hundredth birthday of Nelson Mandela

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Buenos Aires, Argentina -- To mark the hundredth birthday of Nelson Mandela, UPF-Argentina and the Africa House held an event honoring him and his values. Guests included parliamentarians, peace ambassadors, diplomatic representatives of other countries, religious people and leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs). On July 18, participants planted an olive tree at Plazoleta Anchorena, in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, to celebrate the Nelson Mandela International Day (1).

Participants in the ceremony included Monsignor Jorge Lugones, President of the Pastoral-Social Episcopal Commission of the Catholic Church; and Omar Abu Arab El Jatip and Adnan Kassab, assistant secretary general and secretary Árabe, respectively, of the Islam Center in Argentina. Peace Ambassadors who joined were Hermínio Joaquim Escorcio (Angola), Husni Abdel Wahed (Palestine) and Roberto Arango Chiari (Panama). Parliamentarians who participated were Humberto Benedetto, Mercosur Parliamentarian representing Córdoba; María Paula Lopardo, former Deputy representing Buenos Aires City; Mónica Lannutti, Councilor from Río Cuarto (Córdoba); and Ana María López, Director of the San Juan House in Buenos Aires.

Ms. Irene Ortíz Teixeira, President of the Africa House, and Mr. Miguel Werner, secretary general of UPF-Argentina, both gave a few words. Teixeira noted that this olive tree had been watered at the Africa Day celebration that had been held on May 30 at Casa de la Cultura in Buenos Aires City. Mr. Werner highlighted Mandela's values and legacy, as well as his efforts to unify South Africa's peoples.

It was a great opportunity to recognize the culture of the continent that suffered the most during the "Atlantic Age" (from the 16th century to the middle of the 20th century), as well as Africans' contribution to the Argentinian independence movement. It is worth remembering that Monserrat, where the olive tree was planted, was a neighborhood where many Africans lived and suffered. This story was told by Peace Ambassador Jorge Alcaraz, President of Círculo Almafuerite – SADE and Emcee of this event along with Peace Ambassador Patricia Pitaluga, President of the civil society organization Acercando Naciones.

It was also an opportunity to reaffirm the commitment to achieve peaceful coexistence and embrace all peoples and cultures in the 2015-2024 International Decade for People of African Descent: "Recognition, Justice and Development."

Other people who shared this tribute and gesture of commitment for peaceful coexistence were Hipolytte

Basi Ngabo, Counselor at the Democratic Republic of the Congo Embassy; Leinier Espinosa Nodarse, third Secretary at the Cuban Embassy; Arturo Díaz Aceituno, President of the Association of Wives/Husbands of Certified Ambassadors in Argentina; and Adrienn Partí, wife of the Ambassador of Hungary. Gabriel Mouriño, from the Centro de Gestión y Participación Comunal 1 - Buenos Aires City; and Matías Salvo, from the Security and Crime Prevention Council - Ministry of Justice and Security - Government of Buenos Aires City.

Religious representatives included: David Calvo, pastor of the Lutheran Church "Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida;" Faiza Yahia, from the Islam Community; Leonardo Allegue, leader of the Umbanda Community Agrupación Social, Cultural y Religiosa Africanista y Umbandista; Elder John Switzer and Janice Switzer, from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; and María Susana Segovia, public affairs representative from Scientology Argentina.

Directors of civil society organizations were Héctor Pibernus, from the coordinating team of the Argentina's Peace Council; Horacio Daboul, president of "Liga Árabe Cultural y Social" Association; Rosetta Conti, president of the Women Federation for World Peace in Argentina; Andrea Vega, director of Fundación Chacras de Buenos Aires; Juan Manuel Alejandro Cordini, president of the Public Affairs Commission Museo del Estudio Jurídico; and Sergina Da Boa Morte, founder of the Argentinian-Brazilian Cultural Association A Turma Da Bahiana.

Other participants included the journalist and writer Francisco Benard, former diplomat in South Africa and promoter of a common market between South America and Africa; writer and plastic artist Martha Candiotti, vice president of SADE; singer Makenna Zambonini, creator of Noches de Música por la Paz; coach Javier Lelmini and basketball player Víctor Toyo (from Cape Verde) from Club Obras; María Cristina Llorens, from the Group for Parents with Children on the Autism Spectrum and General Developmental Disorder; and Elsa Amelia Ortíz, from the Ballet Huellas del Folklore.

This tribute allowed us to understand the valuable work of Nelson Mandela as a world leader in reconciliation and peace. He worked tirelessly for human rights and recognized the dignity of every person; he uplifted social justice and embraced his people, which was divided by racial conflict. His efforts were recognized when he was elected President of South Africa after he served 27 years in prison, practicing a philosophy that can be summarized by the Ubuntu term: "I am because we are." This philosophy teaches loyalty among people and communities, valuing forgiveness and empathy to transcend resentment and to allow individuals and tribes to ensure the common good.

Mandela's figure was highlighted in two writings dedicated by their authors: "Legado luminoso: A Nelson Mandela, in memoriam," poem by Irene Mercedes Aguirre, teacher, researcher and writer; and "Homenaje a Mandela," a prose by Gladys Semillán Villanueva, poet and painter, a Mandela's admirer (2).

The event was supported by the General Direction of Collectivities - Undersecretary of Human Rights and Cultural Diversity - Buenos Aires City; Marina Mercante University (UdeMM); Rotary Club Internacional Distrito 4895; Women Federation for World Peace-Argentina; Asociación Liga Árabe Cultural y Social; Civil Association Acercando Naciones; Círculo Almafuerte - SADE; Academia Norteamericana de Literatura Moderna; Argentinean School of Yoga and Ayurveda; Centro de Escritores Argentinos y Latinoamericanos; Rotary Club of Parque de los Patricios; Sociedad de Escritores de la Provincia de Buenos Aires - Mar del Plata; Fundación Artes, Educación, Salud para la Recuperación de los Valores (FUND.ART.E.S); and the radio program Esperanza Argentina y Global.

Other supporters were Mercosur Parliamentarian Alberto Asseff; Claudia Calciano, former Deputy representing Buenos Aires City; and poet Ime Biassoni.

This activity was held within the framework of the global campaign "Let's plant trees: Let's sow the seeds of peace," held by UPF-Argentina and the Ecological-Literary Program "Y volverán a ser árboles" to raise awareness on the protection of our "Big House" and to commit to peace.

QUOTES:

1) Nelson Mandela International Day: www.un.org/en/events/mandeladay/

2) Poem and prose sent by their authors for the occasion