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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law

PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CELEBRATES WINNIE MADIKIZELA-MANDELA'S LIFE AS AN AFRICAN WOMAN ACTIVIST

12 April 2018

As South Africans, fellow Africans, and the world, finally bid farewell to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, we at the Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, join to honour the life of this remarkable woman. While it is a time of sadness, it is also a time of celebration.

We celebrate Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in solidarity with all other Africans. Few figures in modern Africa have had the power to unite and inspire as she had. Standing tall and proud, she made visible South Africans' struggle for dignity, and ignited a common sense of purpose among Africans in all corners of the continent.

We celebrate Winnie Madikizela-Mandela as one of South Africa's strongest women: a woman with an indomitable spirit. As an activist and orator and, ultimately, freedom fighter, she became a pillar of the struggle against apartheid, giving strength to men and women, but also inspiring women by showing in the clearest possible ways that a woman can live life on her own terms. Her courage, energy, attire and, above all, daring activism not only constituted a refusal to conform with the expectations of patriarchy, but also irrevocably cemented women's role as formidable political actors. Her struggle was a beacon in the country's ongoing attempts to extricate itself not just from a history of racism but also male dominance and sexism.

We celebrate Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's activism, which kept the torch of freedom burning while apartheid raged around the country. She literally kept the "Mandela" name alive when it was forced into oblivion. Those who pause to ponder her missteps lose sight of the harsh reality -- not of her own choosing -- into which she was thrust. Rather than adopting the posture of a victim of circumstance, she lived a resilient life of fearless resistance. Hers was a struggle not for personal gain, but for recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of those discriminated against, oppressed, excluded, and without the basic means of survival. The dawn of a democratic non-racial South Africa is unthinkable without her.

So many have lost so much: a mother, a sister, a friend, an inspiration, a colleague, a comrade, a symbol of hope ... As much as we have lost, we have -- individually and collectively -- been privileged to have had some part of her.

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