

A TRIBUTE TO NELSON MANDELA

On behalf of the South African Institute for Environmental Health(SAIEH) and the IFEH Africa Group, I would like to pay tribute to this great hero of our lifetime and thank God for the gift of Mandela.

During Madiba's Presidency in South Africa, the country took a bold step to implement a Health Care system which focused mainly on preventative health as compared to curative health as this system was identified by this visionary leader as being sustainable and cost effective as compared to curative health care. A new District Health system was introduced which was also passed into law. This, in itself, put environmental health services and health promotion in the forefront of health care delivery in South Africa. Environmental health professionals had the opportunity to lead transformation of health care services and increased their capacity in addressing challenges of poverty, health and environment, in pursuit of a healthy life for all South Africans.

In 1992, following a request from the National Council Against Smoking (NCAS) in South Africa, Madiba issued a statement in support of World No-Tobacco Day (31 May 1992) in which he endorsed a ban on Tobacco advertising and supported smoke –free public places including other measures on Tobacco control programmes. The following year, 1993, The South African Parliament passed its first Tobacco Products control Act. In the same year, at a Pan African Tobacco Control meeting held in Zimbabwe the African National Congress presented on the vision of a smoke free environment, a presentation by Dr Nkhosasana Zuma who was then appointed as the first democratic South Africa's Minister of Health.

In February 2004 when the hosting of the IFEH 8th World Congress on environmental health took place in Durban, South Africa, Madiba was high on the agenda to come and grace this memorable occasion. Most of our colleagues globally can remember that though we expected him to attend, because we, South Africans, shared him with the rest of the world, he could not attend due to other pressing International commitments.

Madiba was a gift from God that humanity benefitted from. He exemplified the best qualities espoused by humanity.

He was a man respected, admired and loved by people across the world as a role model of what morality really means. He took the lead during the most difficult time in the history of South Africa, when detractors thought that the dawn of a new South Africa would signal the start of bloodshed. He was able to bring peace and unite the South African rainbow nation. He was a statesman that rose above hate and vengeance to embrace peace and reconciliation, a man whose courage, wisdom, visionary leadership and ability to forgive continue to inspire us all.

As we pay tribute to this great leader of our lifetime, we also celebrate a life well lived. One of the many messages that this great man shared with us during his lifetime says "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the lives we lived". We need to commit ourselves to these ideals as Environmental Health professionals globally.

JERRY CHAKA

AFRICA GROUP CHAIRPERSON