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## World pays tribute to Mandela at 92

**JOHANNESBURG:** Nelson Mandela turned 92 on Sunday with US President Barack Obama and other world leaders hailing the anti-apartheid icon's contribution to global politics and human rights.

"We are grateful to continue to be blessed with his extraordinary vision, leadership, and spirit," Obama said in Washington as an increasingly frail Mandela celebrated quietly with extended family at his home in Johannesburg.

Former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda was among the few invited guests at a private gathering where his grandchildren presented Mandela with a three-tier cake and sang "Happy Birthday, dear Granddad", his office said.

"He is very well ... he is healthy and taking into account the kind of life he had, it is really heartening ... he is getting old, he is getting frail but he is absolutely healthy, full of life, spirits high," Man-

dela's wife Graca Machel told BBC.

Sunday was also the first annual Nelson Mandela International Day, declared by the United Nations.

For the occasion, ordinary people in South Africa and abroad committed themselves to devoting 67 minutes of their time to community service, to mark the number of years Mandela spent in politics, an initiative backed by global figures like former US president Jimmy Carter and Martti Ahtisaari of Finland.

"I encourage us all to heed the call to engage in some form of service to others, in honour of the 67 years of sacrifice and service Madiba gave to us," said Obama, referring to South Africa's first black president by his nickname.

A group of 30 bikers including Hollywood actor Morgan Freeman undertook a road-trip from Johannesburg to Cape Town, engaging in

community projects along the way such as building a fence at an AIDS centre at an impoverished township.

The UN celebrated with activities around the world from Zambia in Africa to Kazakhstan in Central Asia.

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan described Mandela as "an exemplary statesman and selfless leader, whose invaluable contributions to human endeavour continue to earn him international repute and goodwill."

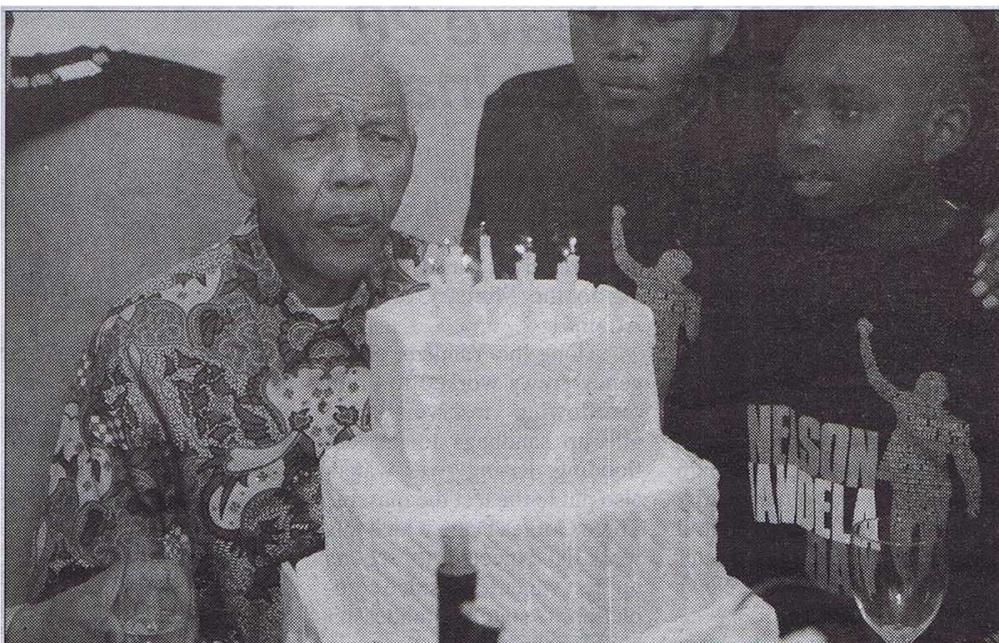
And in Vienna, on the sidelines of the 18th International AIDS Conference, South African Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe led dozens of delegates in a chorus of "Happy Birthday, Madiba" accompanied by the sound of vuvuzelas.

"Nelson Mandela is a towering figure. He embodies the highest values of humanity, and of the United Nations," said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Thousands turned out to celebrate at Mandela's birthplace in Mvezo, hundreds of miles away in the Eastern Cape, where President Jacob Zuma described Mandela as a symbol of unity and tolerance.

Jailed for 27 years by the country's white minority government for resisting apartheid rule, Mandela was released in 1990 and led negotiations with the government that culminated in his election as the country's first black president in 1994.

He stepped down in 1999, after serving one term in office. He has made few public appearances since he retired from public life in 2004. - AFP



In this photo supplied by Peter Morey Photography, Mandela blows out candles as he celebrates his birthday in Johannesburg with his family. - AP Photo