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Mandela charity's fashion line makes runway debut

JOHANNESBURG: A fashion line launched to raise money for Nelson Mandela's AIDS charity made its runway debut Sunday, with high-fashion incarnations of the vivid shirts that he often wore as president.

The clothing created for 46664, the anti-apartheid hero's prison number which is now the name of his charity, appeared on the catwalk for South Africa Fashion Week, with everything from salmon-coloured suits for men to full-length flowing gowns for women.

"What is exciting about this range is that pretty much most people can find something in the range," said Wayne Bebb, CEO of Brand ID, which manages the 46664 label.

"Someone who is quite fashionable would love some of the colours, someone who is little bit more conservative is going to find a very interesting shirt and a pair of denim," he told AFP.

Many of the clothes used prints inspired by the loose shirts that Mandela himself wore after taking office in 1994 as South Africa's first

black president.

A few more muted pieces included slates and charcoals, but pink, green, orange and purple were the order of the day — whether in patchwork shorts for men or smartly tailored suits for women.

Between seven and nine percent of the revenue generated by the clothes will go to Mandela's foundation, which is committed to battling the spread of HIV and AIDS.

The organisation once used mega-concerts with stars like Bono and Annie Lennox to raise money for its work, but 46664 head Ruth Rensburg said the charity now needed other ways of fundraising.

"46664 currently implements Nelson Mandela international day, it takes responsibility for the global co-ordination and implementation of it around the world," she said. "What we will do going forward is look for projects that take forward Mr Mandela's work."

Mandela Day is observed on July 18, the Nobel Peace Prize winner's birthday, when he asks the public to perform community

service.

Mandela was given the number 46664 upon his arrival at South Africa's Robben Island prison in 1964, where he remained until 1982.

He spent time in various prisons on the mainland until his release in 1990 and was elected president following South Africa's first-ever free vote in 1994.

— AFP