

Burma's Suu Kyi Pays Tribute to Nelson Mandela

By [SAMANTHA MICHAELS & LAWI WENG / THE IRRAWADDY](#) On Friday, December 6, 2013 @ 4:56 pm

RANGOON — Burmese democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday expressed condolences for the passing away of Nelson Mandela, the South African leader who died Thursday night.

Nelson Mandela, who died at the age of 95 at his home in Johannesburg after receiving intensive medical care for a lung infection, became his country's first black president after spending 27 years in prison for opposing the apartheid regime.

Suu Kyi herself spent nearly two decades under house arrest in Burma. Since her release in 2010, she has become a member of Parliament and expressed her desire to contest the presidency in elections in 2015.

"I would like to express my extreme grief at the passing away of a man who stood for human rights and equality," the National League for Democracy (NLD) chairperson told reporters in Rangoon.

"He made us all understand that nobody should be penalized for the color of his skin, for the circumstances in which he is born. He also made us understand we can change the world—we can change the world by changing attitudes, by changing perceptions. For this reason I would like to pay him tribute as a great human being who raised the standard of humanity."

Suu Kyi was speaking at the opening ceremony of a two-day international women's forum in Burma's biggest city. The forum, organized in part by the French Embassy and supported by the Burma government, is expected to draw over 400 international and Burmese participants, including International Monetary Fund managing director Christine Lagarde, to discuss social and economic issues from women's perspectives as Burma continues to transition toward a more democratic system.

Suu Kyi's fellow founding member of the NLD, Win Tin, a veteran journalist and former political prisoner, also expressed his sadness over Nelson Mandela's passing.

"I just heard about him this morning and I was sad to hear it. His life and mine had parallels. He stayed in prison for 27 years and I stayed in prison for 20 years. I could understand his feelings, as we had similar lives," Win Tin told The Irrawaddy in a phone interview.

"We really admire the work he did after his release from prison, especially his work for national reconciliation. His work was successful, but our country has not succeed in this."

Win Tin said genuine reconciliation required both sides to collaborate. In the bid to end apartheid, Nelson Mandela, who was released in 1990, worked with South African Prime Minister F.W. de Klerk. The two were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1993.

"But, in our country, the army did not agree to have national reconciliation," said Win Tin.

He called on Burma's current leadership to "study the methods of Mandela."

Hkun Htun Oo, leader of the Shan National League for Democracy, representing ethnic Shan people in Burma, described Nelson Mandela's death as "a loss to the world."

"He was a leader not only in Africa; he was a leader of the world," the Shan politician said.

Hkun Htun Oo praised Nelson Mandela's forgiveness.

"He did not seek revenge, even though he was put in prison for 27 years. He always thought about how to work toward a better future, and he did not take revenge," he

said.

"We all need to learn from his method of giving amnesty. He proved in South African how the system of democracy can be successful, and no one can deny this.

"Our country will also have success if we can have a democratic system, this is my belief. Nelson Mandela paved the road already, and we all should walk this road."

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