

Beat: Vips

Anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela laid to rest

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USPA News - Former South African President Nelson Mandela, who led a multi-racial administration to end the apartheid in his country, was buried Sunday after a funeral service attended by more than 4,000 people, ending 10 days of national mourning for a man whose fame transcended borders. The state funeral began at 8 a.m. local time in the rural town of Qunu where Mandela spent much of his childhood.

More than 4,500 people were in attendance during the two-hour service, which was accompanied by full military ceremonial honors, diplomatic protocol and traditional Xhosa customs. "Today marks the end of an extraordinary journey that began 95 years ago. It is the end of 95 glorious years of a freedom fighter, a dedicated and humble servant of the people of South Africa, a fountain of wisdom, a pillar of strength and a beacon of hope to all those fighting for a just and equitable world order," South African President Jacob Zuma said. Zuma also noted the "spectacular display of admiration" by the thousands of people who descended upon the Union Buildings in Pretoria to view Mandela's body, some even breaking through barricades in an effort to see the popular leader. "We observed the long, patient queues lining the streets to the Union Buildings. Some silent, some singing, many crying," he said. After the televised ceremony, during which relatives, friends, and officials delivered tributes, Mandela's body was taken to the burial site for a more private service with about 450 guests present. The coffin was then lowered into the grave after the national anthem was played and military helicopters flew over the town with the South African flag dangling on weighted cables. Mandela's wish was to be buried next to his relatives at the burial site in Qunu. His father Mphakanyiswa Gadla Henry, his mother Noqaphi Nosekeni and his son Magkatho Lewanika Mandela are among the relatives that were also buried at the family grave site in the Eastern Cape village. Contrary to the funeral service, the burial itself was not broadcast and no pictures were released to allow family members to say their final goodbyes in private. Mandela, before being elected president, was a strong anti-apartheid activist and the leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress. He spent 27 years in prison after being convicted and sentenced to life in prison on charges of sabotage and other crimes. Much of his prison term was served on Robben Island. Mandela was released on February 11, 1990, and became president only four years later, leading the country with a multi-racial administration to end the apartheid. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk were jointly awarded the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local

(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com