Beat: Lifestyle

Nelson Mandela`s wife thanks world for `love, comfort and hope`

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USPA News - Graça Machel, the current wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela, on Monday thanked people from around the world for their `love, comfort and hope` as her husband continues to recover in hospital from a lung infection. Machel, in a statement released by the Nelson Mandela Center of Memory, said the family`s gratitude is "difficult to express" after countless of messages in support of Mandela.

The anti-apartheid icon has been hospitalized in Pretoria since June 8 with a recurrence of a lung infection and remains in a serious condition. "So much love and generosity from South Africans, Africans across the continent, and thousands more from across the world, have come our way to lighten the burden of anxiety; bringing us love, comfort and hope," Machel, the former leader`s third wife, said in her first public comments since the most serious health scare yet. "The messages have come by letter, by SMS, by phone, by Twitter, by Facebook, by e-mail, cards, flowers and the human voice, in particular the voices of children in schools or singing outside our home," she added. "We have felt the closeness of the world and the deepest meaning of strength and peace." She added: "Our gratitude is difficult to express. But the love and peace we feel give yet more life to the simple `Thank you!`" On Sunday, while addressing a gathering in the city of Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal province, South African President Jacob Zuma said the condition of Mandela is continuing to improve although he remains in a serious condition. He asked South Africans to keep Mandela in their thoughts and prayers. "President Nelson Mandela is still in hospital in Pretoria. We are grateful that he continues to get better," Zuma told the audience. "Over the last two days, although he remains serious, his doctors have stated that his improvement has been sustained. He continues to engage with family." Zuma gave no other details about the former leader`s condition but asked the audience to wish him a happy Father`s Day. "I invite you to join me today, in wishing Madiba a very happy Father`s Day today. We love him and know that he loves us too," he said, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. The anti-apartheid icon has been hospitalized several times in recent months, raising concerns about his health condition. Mandela was hospitalized for more than a week in late March, also for a recurrence of a lung infection, and doctors withdrew excess fluid that had accumulated in the space surrounding his lungs. After the procedure in late March, the government revealed Mandela was able to breathe without difficulty, even though it had previously made no mention of breathing problems and instead said the former leader was in "good spirits" and "making steady progress." The government has been repeatedly criticized for being reluctant to provide more specific details about Mandela`s situation, causing uncertainty. Earlier in March, Mandela spent about 24 hours in hospital for what the government described as a `scheduled medical check-up` to manage existing conditions in line with his old age. Officials at the time assured Mandela was "well" but refused to provide more specific details about the nature of the visit. Mandela was also hospitalized in December 2012 for what was later revealed to be a recurrence of a previous lung infection. The anti-apartheid icon also underwent a successful procedure on December 15 to remove gallstones which were discovered while Mandela was undergoing tests. The hospitalization in December lasted for more than three weeks. Major South African news organizations harshly criticized the government`s handling of information relating to Mandela`s hospitalization, complaining that the government did not act on a previously developed protocol that would have ensured the former leader`s privacy while keeping South Africans informed of major developments. Before being elected as president, Mandela 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 for 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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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
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