



GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE PUBLIC EMPLOYEE



The public service delivers with dignity and pride

By Tyrone Seale

A State Funeral for our beloved Madiba: the ultimate call to duty

The nation and the world will forever recall 10 extraordinary days in December 2013 when we took leave of Nelson Mandela - a leader aptly described by President Jacob Zuma as "one of a kind".

None of the widely reported periods of ill health or hospitalisation that had previously grabbed the world's attention could adequately prepare people for the definitive announcement.

Shortly before midnight on 5 December 2013, a visibly mournful President Zuma appeared before television cameras to start his announcement: "My Fellow South Africans, our beloved Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the founding President of our democratic nation, has departed.

"He passed on peacefully in the company of his family around 20h50 on the 5th of December 2013.

"He is now resting. He is now at peace.

"Our nation has lost its greatest son. Our people have lost a father."

The President's announcement of the passing of a close comrade with whom he had associated over the course of decades sent into a motion a range of activities across the country and in South Africa's diplomatic missions abroad.

These activities called for tens of thousands of public servants including those from SAPS, GCIS, DIRCO, DOC, SANDF, DPW, State Security, Social Development, Municipalities and some State-Owned Companies. Nearly 12 000 of these public servants were from the SANDF alone. While a succession of international summits hosted in South Africa before and after the monumental FIFA World Cup 2010 produced methods and technologies with which large-scale events could be successfully managed, the



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nation's first official State Funeral was in a different class altogether.

A mere 10 days was at our disposal to host mega-events in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Qunu at a national level, while provinces and municipalities extended official mourning and tribute activities to their respective levels, so that as many South Africans as possible would be part of this historic occasion.

In addition, nearly 120 past and current heads of state and government and dozens of globally eminent persons indicated their interest in attending either the national memorial service at FNB Stadium or the funeral service at Qunu.

For public servants, all this activity demanded long hours, hard work, focus, sensitivity to the needs and requirements of various stakeholders – and to do so while mourning and grieving as individuals.

The week unfolded with impressive smoothness and efficiency that projected South Africa – via social media, online platforms and broadcast and print media – as a nation that cherished Nelson Mandela as greatly in his passing as we had during his lifetime.

On the Day of Reconciliation – a day after former President Mandela had been laid to rest with full military honours and AbaThembu rituals at his home in Qunu, Eastern Cape –

President Zuma paid tribute to the dedication of public servants during the 10-day period.

Speaking at the unveiling of a nine-metre statue of Madiba on the Southern Lawns of the Union Buildings as part of marking 100 years of the seat of government and declaring this a national heritage site, the President said: "Allow me to use this opportunity to thank the Inter-Ministerial Committee for State Funerals, chaired by the Minister in the Presidency Mr Collins Chabane, and the related technical support committees, for their sterling job in organising a dignified burial for our beloved Madiba.

"The excellent logistical arrangements have once again demonstrated the capability of our country to host international events of this magnitude.

"We hosted heads of state and government, royalty, eminent persons, entertainers, global business sector and all sorts of global personalities.

"I would like, on behalf of government and the people of our country, the rainbow nation, to thank all our security services, who worked hard to protect citizens and foreign dignitaries and guests.

"We acknowledge our police officials who went beyond the call of normal duty, and were seen comforting citizens who were overcome with grief after viewing the body of Madiba at the Union Buildings. They were ably assisted by the SA National Defence medical services personnel.

"Let me also single out the South African National Defence Force, which made the nation proud with the exceptional and dignified farewell

they gave to the former Commander-in-Chief.



"The military health services had first touched the nation in the manner in which they looked after him while he was ill. And later, the SANDF put out all stops to give him a befitting farewell.

"We also thank the media, both locally and internationally, for taking the Madiba story to the world with dignity and respect.

"We thank all the South African people. Working together, the rainbow nation ensured that Tata is laid to rest in a manner befitting a global icon.

"Let us all get back to work tomorrow, to build the South Africa that Madiba sacrificed 27 years of his life in prison for.

"Let us all work together, united in our diversity as the famous rainbow nation on the Southern tip of Africa, to build a better South Africa, united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous."

The cloud of mourning can indeed make way for the rainbow nation to respond to the President's call and make sure that the legacy and values of Nelson Mandela live on forever in our country and in our hearts.