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Congresswoman Waters' Statement on the Passing of Nelson Mandela

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Washington, D.C. -- *Congresswoman Maxine Waters (CA-43) released the following statement after learning of the death of Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa and international civil rights icon. He was 95 years old.*

"I am deeply saddened by the death of former South African President Nelson Mandela. Today, the people of South Africa have lost a leader and the world has lost an icon. His death is a loss to his family, to the country of South Africa and to the world.

"After spending an unjust 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela was the first black South African to be elected President in the first multi-racial election in South Africa's history. President Mandela used his administration to dismantle the disdainful legacy of apartheid, tackle institutional racism and begin the process of racial reconciliation. Beginning with his time as the founder of the African National Congress Youth League and extending beyond his tenure as President of South Africa, Mandela led the anti-apartheid movement and inspired a generation of activists.

"When I reflect upon my own career in public service, I am among that generation of protestors who have been inspired by President Mandela's courage, dedication and wisdom. I also consider myself among those who have had the distinct honor and privilege of knowing him and calling him a friend.

"While a member of the California State Assembly, the effort to end apartheid in South Africa was one of the most important and formative moments of my political career. This effort culminated in the 1986 passage of Assembly Bill 134, legislation that allowed California to divest \$12 billion in state pension funds tied to the apartheid regime in South Africa. In 1990, I chaired the welcome committee for the Los Angeles leg of his eight-city tour of the United States, and I helped organize a concert and rally that was filled to capacity at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

"I traveled with the official American delegation to attend the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa in 1994; and in 1998, I was honored to welcome President Mandela to the United States once again, this time to receive the Congressional Gold Medal.

"President Mandela was an inspiration to millions of people, both in South Africa and throughout the world. At 95 years old, he lived a full and purposeful life, and truly changed the world with his dedication to freedom, equality, and human rights. He was not only an extraordinary gift to South Africa, but a gift to humankind. President Mandela will truly be missed. My thoughts and prayers are with his wife Graca Machel, his children and grandchildren."