



Mandela at 90: A guide for students' unions

On Friday 18 July 2008 millions of people throughout the world will celebrate Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday. It will be an occasion to recognise Mandela's great qualities and also to focus on the achievements, opportunities and challenges of the movement for development, justice and rights for southern Africa.

This year provides us not only with the opportunity to celebrate Mandela the man, the movement he represented and also the role that the UK student movement played in the struggle.

Twenty years ago, on Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday, he was in prison and the Anti Apartheid Movement in Britain organised a major concert at Wembley in London to mark the occasion. Students' unions across the UK played a significant role in the British Anti Apartheid Movement and in keeping the issue of South Africa on the agenda, including a 17 year campaign that forced Barclays to stop investing in the country. Twenty years ago, during June and July 1988, students throughout the UK participated in the Nelson Mandela Freedom March that ran from Glasgow to Hyde Park in London calling for Mandela's release and an end to apartheid.

ACTSA, the successor to the British Anti Apartheid Movement wants to involve people, communities and organisations throughout the UK in the celebration of Mandela's 90th year by encouraging local events, activities and action throughout the summer months.

The aims of the campaign are:

- To celebrate Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday appropriately and sensitively
- To provide information on the context and history of the struggle against apartheid
- To celebrate the achievements of the movement against apartheid and for freedom and justice for South and southern Africa.
- To inform people in Britain about the development challenges that still confront South and southern Africa
- To involve people in Britain in committing to support the development of South and southern Africa, promoting democracy, justice and development

ACTSA believes that students' unions should play a major part in these celebrations, not least to celebrate their role in the struggle to bring an end to the injustice and racism that devastated South Africa for so many years.

The Mandela at 90 campaign provides students' unions with an opportunity to educate your members about development in southern Africa. It allows us to recognise the successes and challenges facing the region. It also provides an opportunity to work in solidarity with your fellow student officers in southern Africa.

Nelson Mandela's birthday takes place on July 18th, a time when there is unlikely to be a great deal of activity on campus. That is why we are encouraging students' unions to organise activity not just in the weeks leading up to Nelson Mandela's birthday but throughout the year, up to and including Black History Month in October.



What can students' unions do?

There are many simple and effective ways you can support the Mandela at 90 campaign, a few of which we've listed here:

Birthday cards: 90,000 pledges for Mandela at 90

Perhaps the easiest way to promote participation in the campaign is to encourage your members to sign a birthday pledge for Mandela at 90 (below). The use of birthday cards was a key part of the Free Nelson Mandela Campaign in the UK throughout the 1980s with thousands of people throughout the UK involved in sending birthday greetings to Mandela during his time in prison on Robben Island. This year we are asking people to sign up to a birthday pledge that has a lasting impact on southern Africa. Artwork for the Mandela at 90 card is available and giant A3 cards are available to order from ACTSA.

You could also provide a link from your website to ACTSAs online birthday card

A message from the people of Britain.

We join the peoples of the world in sending you our congratulations on your 90th birthday. We salute your lifelong contribution to the movement for freedom, democracy, peace and rights for all.

We pledge our continued solidarity and support for the people of southern Africa as they continue to fight against poverty, HIV and AIDS, inequality, racism, other injustices and work for peace and a better future for all.

Create a giant pledge flag for Mandela at 90

This highly visual stunt will involve up to 130 of your members creating a giant South African flag consisting of their birthday pledges for Mandela at 90. You can download the pack on the resources page of ACTSAs Mandela at 90 web pages.

Rededicate your Mandela Room

During the apartheid era many students' unions named a room or even their building after Mandela. Why not use the occasion of Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday to rededicate your room or building to their namesake? A wealth of anti apartheid campaign materials are available to 'Re-Mandela-ise' your Mandela Room from ACTSA. Contact ACTSA for more information.

Hold an event

Incorporate a celebration of Mandela's 90th birthday into an existing event. Use it as an opportunity to get people to sign the pledge card and play southern African music or music from the Anti Apartheid era.

Involve RAG and clubs and societies

Speak to your RAG group about fundraising for a southern African project or organisation. Contact ACTSA for more information about projects throughout the region. Some of your clubs and societies may also have an interest in campaigning on development or in issues effecting southern Africa and will therefore be interested in the campaign.



Show a film

There are many films that highlight the fight against apartheid and the challenges facing post apartheid southern Africa. In addition to the major blockbusters available, there are also a number of films produced by smaller independent companies. Speak to your film society about promoting Mandela at 90 through film at one of their meetings. ACTSA has produced a synopsis of South African films.

Lectures

Many institutions will have departments that teach modules or courses on southern Africa or development. You could encourage them to hold a commemorative public lecture for Mandela at 90.

Sporting events

Although all eyes this year may well be on the Olympic games, they will soon be looking to 2010, when South Africa will be hosting the FIFA World Cup. The biggest sporting event ever held on the continent.

Sport provides a great opportunity to provide a focus on southern Africa, particularly for those who were too young to be involved in the Anti Apartheid Movement. You could encourage your sports teams to do something to celebrate Mandela at 90. For example you could ask football teams to play a '90 minutes for Mandela' match. Other sports teams or groups could also look at ways they could commemorate the occasion through a sponsored event or fundraiser.

Contact your Local Authority

ACTSA has written to every council in Britain to encourage them to get involved in the campaign. Let them know what you are doing for Mandela at 90, it could help you gain publicity for your plans.

Keep ACTSA informed

Whatever you plan to do for Mandela at 90, make sure you let ACTSA know and we'll promote it in our events listings online.