

IISH Web Dossier

The Netherlands and Nelson Mandela



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Front cover photos

Selection of campaign buttons from the IISH's collection

Collecting signatures for the release of Nelson Mandela, Dam square, Amsterdam, autumn 1980 (photo: José Melo) / Protest at the South African embassy in The Hague, 1984 (photo: Jan Stegeman)

Graça Machel and Nelson Mandela laying a wreath at Dam square. Amsterdam 11 March 1999 (photo: Jan Stegeman)

The Netherlands and Nelson Mandela

The greatest South African in history, a mythical symbol of reconciliation and leadership: this is how, in the eyes of Dutch public opinion, Nelson Mandela emerges today. One doesn't have to go back far in history, however, to find quite a few Dutch politicians and commentators who, if they knew of Mandela at all, saw him as a 'terrorist', or, at best, a political nobody securely locked up on his faraway prison island.

Why and how did Dutch activists of different orientations incessantly campaign for the release of this South African prisoner, who became the symbol of all political prisoners in South Africa, thought to hold the key to South Africa's future?

First reports

Half a century ago no such thing as a Mandela myth existed in the Netherlands. The prevailing myth, questioned by very few at the time, was that of 'kinship' between the Netherlands as '*the mother*' and white South Africa as '*the grown-up daughter*', in the words of the Dutch Prime Minister of the day. In South Africa the Nationalist apartheid government had taken office in 1948. Four years later the entry into force of a Cultural Treaty between The Hague and Pretoria made big news in Dutch newspapers; in the same year festivities in both countries celebrated the tercentennial of Jan van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape in 1652.

Less generously, Dutch newspaper readers were also informed on the civil disobedience campaign against racial laws ('Defiance Campaign') that had started in South Africa in the same year. Reports on mass arrests made the papers, but the Dutch press failed to mention that Nelson Mandela, one the principal organizers, was among the detainees. It was on 11 December 1952

that the name of '*the native lawyer Nelson Mandela*' was first heard in the Dutch radio news. A few months later, Mandela ('*the prominent African negro leader*') was quoted in another report, only to reemerge in the radio news after another eight years.

Early acquaintance

Not many Dutch had met or seen Mandela in person; among the few who had was Karel Roskam, future co-founder of the Comité Zuid-Afrika (CZA), the first Dutch permanent anti-apartheid committee, who worked in South Africa in 1959-1960. Years later, Roskam told that he had soon sensed Mandela's captivating and impressive personality, even though he had not been able to hear Mandela speak because of the banning order.

Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, president of the South African Indian Congress (l), and Nelson Mandela (r) in 1952, after their arrest during the Defiance Campaign (photo: Eli Weinberg)



Red:	Datum:	Tijd:	Onderwerp:
...scherp	11. dec.	10.12 20	leider verzetsactie-rassen- wetten mag niet meer vergaderen

1.	De leider leider van de verzetsactie tegen de rassen-
2.	wetten in Zuidafrika, de inheemse rechtskundige Nelson
3.	Mandela, mag zes maanden zes maanden geen vergaderingen bijwonen
4.	in Johannesburg. De Zuidafrikaanse minister van Justitie heeft
5.	hem ook verboden ^{te wonen} buiten het district, ^{Johannesburg} waar onder zijn valt.
6.	leider Nelson Mandela is president van de afdeling Transvaal
7.	van het Afrikaanse nationale congres.

Dutch Radio News, 11 December 1952, typoscript
('Leader of resistance campaign against racial laws
banned from attending meetings')
(© ANP Foundation)

Mandela was one of 156 accused in the so-called Treason Trial, which lasted from 1956 to 1961. G.B.J. Hiltermann, a prominent Dutch international affairs commentator at the time, visited South Africa shortly before the end of the trial, and after his return became the first to present Nelson Mandela on Dutch television. During his trip, he told his viewers, he had interviewed, among other South Africans, two accused ANC leaders, one of them 'a lawyer from Johannesburg, Mandela,' whom he introduced as 'a very powerful and ardent advocate of Bantu interests.'

Black Pimpernel jailed

The story of Mandela as the 'Black Pimpernel', who organized protests, gave a surprise address to a large conference and granted interviews to the press, all in defiance of his banning order, and travelled abroad to rally support for his cause, ever outsmarting the police, soon appeared in the Dutch press as well. When, at last, Mandela was caught in August 1962, the news was deemed important – or thrilling – enough to warrant front page attention in the Netherlands.

Still, Dutch media attention to developments in South Africa was far from widespread. The courtroom statement made by Mandela before he was sentenced to five years on charges of inciting a strike and travelling abroad without proper license was published over more than one page by the weekly *Vrij Nederland*, one of the few Dutch newspapers that had always written critically about apartheid. In South Africa Mandela's speech 'is distributed underground, more or less in the way the underground press operated during the German occupation of the Netherlands,' according to the weekly, which had its roots as an underground paper in World War 2.



On 30 January 1961 Dutch TV viewers were offered a glimpse of two leaders of the banned African National Congress, in a programme by G.B.J. Hiltermann on 'the "apartheid policy" in the Union of South Africa.' Hiltermann: 'I don't let them say complicated, dangerous political things (...). I just want to show them to you and let you hear their voices, in order to give you an impression of these people and their personalities.' A British interview broadcasted in June 1961 (ITN Roving Report) is generally labeled as 'the first TV interview with Mandela,' even on Dutch broadcasting websites. In fact, Hiltermann's TV programme preceded the British interview by almost five months. The tape was unearthed only recently from the Dutch TV archives. The photo shows Mandela as viewers in the Netherlands saw and heard him during 25 seconds in January 1961.

After Mandela's arrest and conviction, CZA, the Dutch anti-apartheid committee, did its utmost to inform the Dutch public on his fate. CZA also sent a telegram to the Dutch government, in which it urged The Hague to raise a protest with the South African authorities on the ongoing police harassment of Mandela's wife Winnie. The government turned down the request, pointing out that this would amount to interfering with the *'internal affairs of another nation.'*



Protest delegation of CZA and representatives of students' and youth organisations at the South African embassy in The Hague, 2 May 1963. Standing far left is Ed van Thijn of CZA, who became Home Affairs Minister and mayor of Amsterdam later. 5th from left is Labour MP and CZA chairman Joop Voogd. The photo has been presented as depicting 'the first Dutch action for the release of Mandela,' but the occasion was a different one: the adoption on 1 May 1963 by the South African government of anti-sabotage legislation, allowing the police to hold persons in solitary confinement for 90 days without trial. The petitioners asked for the release of Robert Sobukwe of the Pan Africanist Congress, not Nelson Mandela.

Rivonia Trial

Then, in July 1963, most of the remaining ANC leadership were arrested in their hideout in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia. As more evidence had emerged on Mandela's leading role in organizing armed resistance against apartheid, he was taken out of his prison cell; in the 'Rivonia Trial' he now faced the charge of high treason, a capital offence.

Among the CZA records kept at the International Institute of Social History is the correspondence between the Dutch committee and the ANC's London office and the British Anti-Apartheid Movement on the ensuing international campaign for the release of political prisoners in South Africa. In a request for support from October 1963 the exiled ANC specifically mentioned Walter Sisulu, leader of the underground movement at the time of the arrests, *'and Nelson Mandela, Sisulu's predecessor as underground leader.'*

Dutch government remains silent

Socialist and social democratic members of parliament were critical of the Dutch government's failure to act on the trial. Referring to the *'close ties between both nations'* Joseph Luns, the Dutch Foreign Minister, defended a wait-and-see policy; Luns preferred, *'in view of South Africa's particular sensibilities where the Netherlands is concerned,'* to leave it to the United Nations to act. When, however, the Dutch government was asked by the UN to lodge a protest with the South African government, Luns turned a deaf ear.

In Pretoria, the trial was closely followed by a member of the Dutch embassy staff, Coen Stork, who was later to become Dutch ambassador to Cuba and Rumania (and still later, chairman of the

In 1962, Nelson Mandela, one of the great leaders of the African people, standing in court for his anti-apartheid activities, said: One cannot expect men to do nothing, to say nothing, not to react to injustice, not to protest against oppression, not to strive for a place in a just society.

Lawyer and ANC member Harold Wolpe, who escaped after being arrested in Rivonia, paraphrased Mandela's defence statement in his speech at a public protest meeting in Amsterdam on 6 February 1964, co-organized by CZA.

Nelson Mandela
 Republic of South Africa
 11th June, 1964.

Alex van Stork,

I am writing to you before the final outcome of this case because, thereafter, it will not be possible for me to do so.

My colleagues and I deeply appreciate the invaluable assistance you have given us. The personal interest you have shown in the case, and the strong support we are receiving from all sections of the Dutch population, give us enormous reserves of strength and courage.

We would like you to know that we regard you as one of our greatest friends, and are sure you will continue to be of assistance to our people in their struggle against racial discrimination.

UNGABINIMA NANGOMSE

Yours very sincerely
 NRMandela

Letter of thanks written by Nelson Mandela on 11 June 1964, on the eve of his conviction, to Coen Stork at the Dutch embassy in Pretoria

Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa). There was no instruction from The Hague to attend the trial, but by maintaining a steady presence Stork, who was allowed a free hand by his superiors, and a few fellow diplomats from other countries hoped to prevent the trial from going unnoticed outside South Africa. Stork has kept, to this day, a letter of thanks handwritten by Nelson Mandela on the eve of the verdict.

In April 1964, the 'World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners' sent a delegation to the Netherlands. CZA arranged for meetings

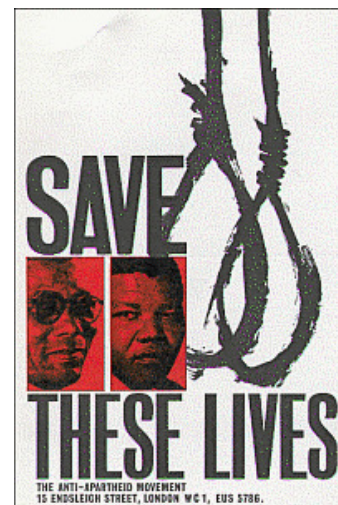
with trade unions, churches, political parties and other organisations; however, not all of those approached were prepared to meet the South Africans.

On 12 June 1964, Mandela and most other Rivonia trialists were sentenced to life imprisonment. The verdict immediately led to

demonstrations, also in the Netherlands. In the centre of Amsterdam, in the night between 12 and 13 June, some teenage boys were seen running away after painting 'anti-Verwoerd slogans and the name of the negro leader Mandela' – as one newspaper wrote – on the pavement and the office of the Holland-Africa Line shipping company. As records of the Amsterdam police show, such



Protesters in Amsterdam demand 'freedom for Mandela' (newspaper photo from communist daily De Waarheid)



Postcard, campaign for the release of political prisoners in South Africa, with portraits of the Rivonia accused Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela, May 1964 (from CZA archive, IISH)

activists were usually suspected to be members of the communist youth movement. CZA defined itself as a broad committee that included *'the major democratic political groups and denominations'*; communists, however honestly opposed to apartheid in the eyes of CZA, were seen as undemocratic and were excluded from participating in the committee.

Words that became famous

The words by which Mandela concluded his statement from the dock at the trial, on 20 April 1964, once again left a deep impression. A Dutch progressive weekly published part of his statement

twelve days later, on 2 May, more than a month before the verdict was passed.



From: Het Parool, 13 June 1964

After Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment on 12 June 1964, many Dutch newspapers published quotes from the defence statement of the *'unflinching enemy of the doctrine of apartheid.'* Dutch observers were struck, already then, by *'Mandela's determination and good spirits. He was the only one of the accused who did not look downcast during the trial, and was*

regularly seen making the well-known thumbs-up gesture, which for the negroes in Africa has a meaning similar to that of our V sign during the last World War.'

Echoes of German occupation

Once again, a former underground newspaper (the quote was from Het Parool) referred to World War 2 when writing about the struggle against apartheid. In a later example, Het Parool wrote about Hendrik Verwoerd's refusal to bow to foreign demands to show mercy towards Mandela and

I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

The often-quoted concluding words of Mandela's defence statement at the Rivonia trial, in the version that was published in Dutch by the weekly newspaper De Groene Amsterdammer on 2 May 1964 under the headline 'Ready to die – Perhaps the last words of the African leader Nelson Mandela'. What Mandela really said during the trial is now known thanks to an original audio-recording being recovered and restored in 2001.

his fellow condemned. The apartheid Prime Minister kept playing the Cold War card by denouncing the conspiracy of Mandela and his brothers-in-arms as *'communist'*; shouldn't the civilized nations of the West be defended against the threat of world communism? The editor of Het Parool commented sarcastically that *'It is to be expected from an admirer of Hitler such as Verwoerd that he will make all adversaries of his apartheid regime out to be communists.'*

Mandela's role played out?

It was far from obvious for Dutch observers of the time to think of Mandela and his ANC colleagues as a future leadership generation. Some would



Robert Sobukwe (1924-1978)



October 1977: second visit of Oliver Tambo (r) to Prime Minister Den Uyl; Den Uyl had also received the ANC leader in 1975 (photo: Han Singels)

identify the breakaway Pan Africanist Congress, led by Mandela's former ANC Youth League comrade, Robert Sobukwe, as having better credentials. In 1977, coded messages from the Dutch embassy in Pretoria to the government in The Hague conveyed the observation that the ANC, which had been banned many years ago and was forced to operate from abroad, lacked popular support inside the country; the ambassador wrote that he had been told by anti-apartheid reverend Beyers Naudé that in an ideological sense the ANC of today was no longer the ANC 'of the time of Mandela and Luthuli.'

Meeting ANC leaders

For the progressive new Dutch government under Labour Prime Minister Joop den Uyl (1973-1977), however, the ANC was certainly not a thing of the past. During his stint as Prime Minister Den Uyl received O.R. Tambo, president of the exiled ANC, twice for an official visit.

Meeting the jailed actual top leader of the ANC was out of the question, however, especially since this would entail travelling to South Africa. No member of the new cabinet would have thought of setting foot in the country of apartheid. A few years earlier, Minister J.A. Bakker of the centre-right government of the day would still have had a chance to speak to Mandela – if he had wished to. In 1970, despite protests, he had travelled to South Africa and met many people there. But Bakker had declined to press for a meeting with Mandela.

In parliament, after Bakker's return, Labour MP Wierenga quoted Mandela's wife Winnie as saying that *'Bakker's visit betrays our case.'* Wierenga rejected the minister's 'realpolitik' line of argument; Bakker had preferred to meet those in South Africa with the political clout to deliver real change, but he *'forgets that, unless the situation changes, at the end of the day political change may be effected by the likes of Mandela, Fischer, etc., to the detriment of Vorster and friends.'* Bakker, however, maintained that any change in South African policies *'will not primarily come from Mr. Mandèle, who is, of course, gagged politically.'* The misspelling in the parliamentary proceedings was indicative of how little known Mandela still was at the time.



Bram Fischer (1908-1975) was Mandela's defence lawyer at the Rivonia trial, and was later detained himself by the apartheid regime

Anti-apartheid publications

Rather surprising with hindsight is that even after the Rivonia verdict Dutch publications on the struggle of South Africans against apartheid could still appear in which not a single reference was made to Nelson Mandela. Other publications, however, kept the fire burning, including an International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) brochure on Mandela from 1964, circulated by CZA and

the Dutch branch of the Defence and Aid Fund. On a gramophone record issued in 1971 Mandela's full statement was read in Dutch, with South African freedom songs on the flipside. The record went with 'a free booklet with further information about Nelson Mandela and the struggle in South Africa.'

[Mandela's defence statement] is an essential period document for anybody who wants to keep abreast of the situation of the oppressed people of South Africa.

An example of Mandela being used as a vehicle to draw attention to South Africa: the Dutch International South African Refugee Aid Foundation issued a long-playing record with Mandela's defence statement of 1964, read in Dutch, complemented with South African freedom songs.

Free Mandela and all other prisoners!

By the end of 1971, CZA had to make way for the more radical Anti-Apartheid Movement (Anti-Apartheids Beweging Nederland, AABN). CZA remained concerned about the fate of Nelson Mandela and his wife Winnie to the very end. When Winnie Mandela and others were immediately re-arrested after having been acquitted by a South African court, CZA sent a letter of protest to the South African government. 'Our protest was published in a number of newspapers,' the committee noted in one of its final reports.



Portraits of Mandela carried at by picketers demanding freedom for Bram Fischer, South African embassy, The Hague, 7 February 1975 (photo: Bert Wallenburg)

In 1974, ten years after Rivonia, the British anti-apartheid movement revived the World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners, under the new slogan of 'Free Nelson Mandela and All Political Prisoners in Southern Africa.' In the Netherlands, it was especially the fledgling AABN which felt spurred on to become more active on the issue of political prisoners. New trials

and convictions – also death sentences – caused an extension of the list of names; in all Dutch campaigns, however, the name of Nelson Mandela held firm. Mandela's portrait was carried at demonstrations, and his name invariably topped the list of prisoners. His impressive defence speech was being quoted time and again in brochures.

No tributes yet

The old ANC leadership had sat in jail on life sentences for years. It was due to the efforts



'Freedom for all political prisoners in South Africa', meeting in Amsterdam with O.R. Tambo as main speaker, 26 September 1975; Mandela's portrait is visible next to the platform (photo: Bert Wallenburg)

of the various branches of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement that, after all that time, Nelson Mandela didn't pass into oblivion here. Among new names that gained prominence was that of Steve Biko, who had risen to fame as leader of the Black Consciousness Movement before he died in a South African prison in 1977. In Amsterdam in 1978 a square was officially renamed after Steve Biko; there were no plans yet to name any squares or bridges after Mandela.



Amsterdam: Pretorius Square renamed Steve Biko Square

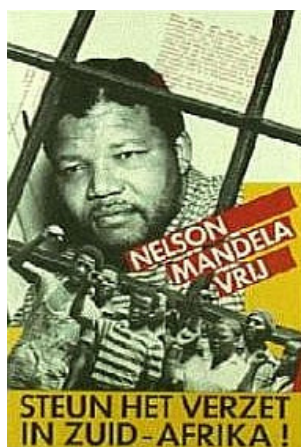
In January 1978 the University of Amsterdam awarded a honorary doctorate to a Rivonia trialist – not Mandela, but Govan Mbeki (father of Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's successor as president in 1999). Although ample attention was paid to Mbeki's most prominent fellow-Robben Islander in all the publicity concerning the doctorate – including lengthy quotes from Mandela's defence statement – it was the relatively obscure Mbeki rather than Mandela who got the doctorate, on account of his scholarly book *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt*.

South Africa hits the news

Dutch anti-apartheid sentiments were especially fuelled by events in Soweto on 16 June 1976, when apartheid police lashed out at peaceful protesters against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as the main teaching language in black schools. Two days later, a Dutch newspaper quoted Winnie Mandela, 'a well-known militant against apartheid and the wife of Robben Island prisoner Nelson Mandela,' as saying that language was not the real issue: 'the entire population has risen against the apartheid policies of the Vorster regime.'



Solidarity march occasioned by the Soweto revolt, Amsterdam, 28 August 1976 (photo: Hans van den Boogaard)



Nelson Mandela's 60th birthday in July 1978 was seized upon, in the Netherlands as elsewhere, to draw attention to what was going on in South Africa. The socialist VARA television broadcasted a 20 minutes' programme on Mandela, as part, viewers were told, of a congratulation campaign by 'the anti-apartheid movement, the ANC and Amnesty International.' Mandela, it was said, was gagged and no recent images of Mandela could be shown; yet, he remained 'the major symbol of the South African liberation struggle.' The Dutch viewers were asked to follow the example of the British Prime Minister, who had sent Mandela a telegram; addresses of Nelson and Winnie Mandela were shown on screen.

Poster published by the AABN on the occasion of Mandela's 60th birthday in 1978. The photomontage was made by Rob Schröder and Lies Ros, using a portrait of Mandela by the South African photographer Eli Weinberg; Schröder and Ros were among the most prolific Dutch designers of anti-apartheid publications



'Freedom for political prisoners in South Africa': presentation of a petition for the release of the 'Pretoria 12' to Foreign Minister Van der Klaauw, The Hague, 17 January 1978 (photo: Bert Zijlma)

Another impulse from South Africa

Then, on 9 March 1980, the Sunday Post, a black South African newspaper, started a campaign for the release of Nelson Mandela. The campaign inside South Africa was proof that the memory of Mandela was still alive in his own country. Messages of support and signatures of those asking for his release poured in from all quarters.

Although the international anti-apartheid movement was quick to get on the bandwagon, it was initially a purely internal South African affair. The major international conference held in the Netherlands in mid-March 1980, bringing together the ANC, the UN, anti-apartheid groups and others on the issue of the oil embargo against South Africa, is a case in point. Recent developments in the apartheid country were touched upon in a succession of speeches and statements during the Amsterdam conference, yet not a single word was said on the remarkable campaign for Nelson Mandela that had just started.

By far the largest percentage of our people still regard Nelson Mandela as the number one leader of our people (...). Mandela commands a following that is unheard of in this land.

From the call by the editors of the Sunday Post to support the petition for the release of Nelson Mandela, 9 March 1980. The paper was banned from publication because of the initiative.

[W]e need Nelson Mandela because he is almost certainly going to be [our] first black Prime Minister.

A modest prediction, seen with hindsight, by Desmond Tutu, as quoted in 1980 in the Netherlands in an AABN campaign journal. Bishop Tutu was one of the supporters of the Sunday Post campaign.



Desmond Tutu in the Netherlands, 1984 (photo: Jan Stegeman)

56,000 signatures

Soon Nelson Mandela became a key figure in anti-apartheid campaigning outside South Africa, including the Netherlands. There were the usual consultations between the exiled ANC and the campaigning groups on the course to follow. Changes in focus, however, never came about in a

one-way traffic. The ANC leadership had only gradually started to move after 1978, when the international campaign had already begun to take shape. Initially, the ANC would broadly refer to *'Mandela and other political prisoners'*; only later, it began to advocate a campaign for Mandela alone. Oliver Tambo's first public call came in August 1982, when he asked the international community to step up the *'Free Mandela Campaign'*.

'Freedom for James Mange and all jailed South African freedom fighters – Boycott South Africa – Support the ANC' (AABN poster). Mange was a young ANC combatant, the first to be sentenced to death for planning an assault causing no casualties (in late 1979)



The first action that took place in the Netherlands after the start of the Sunday Post campaign still went under the combined slogan *'Free James Mange and Nelson Mandela'* (sometimes extended to include *'all political prisoners'*). After the summer of 1980, the next broad campaign – initiated by

AABN and Kairos – was focused entirely on Nelson Mandela. Within a few months 45 organisations, including all progressive political parties as well as the Christian Democratic CDA party, two trade union federations, churches, the Council of Churches, youth organisations and solidarity groups had endorsed the campaign, and a petition to the government attracted more than 56,000 signatures.



Collecting signatures on Amsterdam's central Dam square, autumn 1980. To the left Mandela's portrait on a banner in use by AABN since 1976 (photo: José Melo)



The Hague, 26 November 1980: AABN and Kairos activists (3rd from right: Conny Braam) handing more than 56,000 signatures to a representative of the Foreign Minister (the minister himself happened to be in Mozambique that day)

Attractive aim

One of the initiators of the petition, the Working Group Kairos, Christians against Apartheid, also played a key role in the oil embargo and Shell boycott campaign. The endorsement of the Sunday Post campaign earlier that year by the South African Council of Churches certainly helped to win over Kairos's own constituency to support the Dutch petition. In its Annual Report for 1980

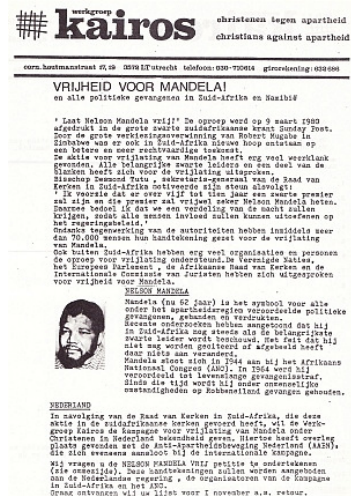
During his eighteen years of imprisonment, [Mandela], more than anybody else, has embodied the opposition of black South Africans against apartheid (...). I hope that, at long last, the South African government will lend an ear to the international call to release Mandela and others.

Foreign Minister Van der Klaauw (right-wing liberal) was not present to accept 56,000 signatures in November 1980, but a few months later he told MPs in parliament what he had to say about Mandela (5 February 1981).

Kairos stated that *'specific actions and publications on concrete issues such as political prisoners ('Free Mandela!')* will more readily appeal to large parts of our target group than the fight against the powers in our own society (such as the oil companies).'

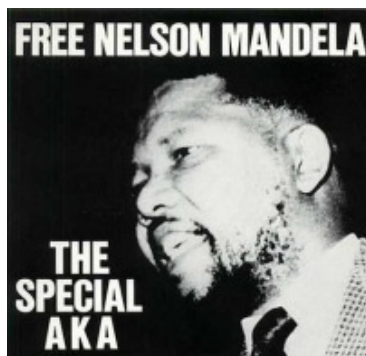
Even so, it was no easy decision at the time for leading Christian Democrats to sign petitions related to South Africa; Mandela, for his part, had not yet reached the status of being everybody's friend.

Kairos campaign leaflet, 1980; on the back side there was room for signatures



Unknown hero in top 30

Reviewing the large campaign of 1980 in its Annual Report, Kairos deplored *'that the organizers appeared incapable of providing accessible background information on Mandela in time.'* Efforts to repair this omission included the publication in 1984 of a booklet written by a Kairos staff member, with a broad audience rather than Kairos's own constituency in



Big hit: 'Free Nelson Mandela' by The Special AKA (1984)

view. The starting question was simple and clear: *"Free Nelson Mandela" was the title of an English hit record which in the spring of 1984 spent several weeks in the Dutch top 30. What makes people make a song for a man who has been in jail for more than twenty years? Just who is this Nelson Mandela?'*

The massive petition of 1980 remained a one-off event. The following year, policy proposals jointly published by the four major Dutch anti-apartheid groups – the Holland Committee on Southern Africa (KZA), Boycott Outspan Action (BOA), AABN and Kairos – included a *'package of 32 concrete proposals for a new Dutch policy on Southern Africa.'* Item No. 21 – *'The Netherlands actively advocates for the release of all political prisoners in South Africa and Namibia'* – was the only proposal, in eleven densely printed pages, that came anything near to the 'Free Nelson Mandela!' demand.

Less conspicuous actions went on all the same. In 1982, mayors of Dutch towns were asked to sign a petition for the release of Mandela, a British initiative propagated via the UN, and taken up here

by AABN and the local Groningen Working Group on Southern Africa; Home Affairs Minister Ed van Thijn had agreed to recommend the petition. Also in 1982 the UN Office in Brussels appealed to Kairos for help in the ongoing UN campaign for Mandela; the UN hoped to collect as many signatures as possible among prominent people demanding the release of Mandela. *'In view of the tight deadline for the action (mid-December) it was decided to refrain from cooperating,'* the Kairos board concluded.

Escape plan safely locked away

In 1993, the AABN magazine *De Anti Apartheidskrant* reported that documents concerning a bold plan to free Mandela from Robben Island had been safely locked away for twelve years in a Dutch safe.

According to the plan, a helicopter would have picked up Mandela on New Year's Eve 1981 and taken him to a foreign mission in Cape Town, a few miles away, where he was to apply for asylum.

The plan was scuttled as ANC intelligence feared that Pretoria had got wind of it. Conny Braam, the AABN chairwoman, smuggled the documents from the then ANC headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, to the Netherlands; finally, in 1993, the documents were given to the Mayibuye Centre in Cape Town and put on exhibition.

The Star, Johannesburg, May 1993



Between 1986 and 1990, Braam herself was involved, in utmost secrecy, in the ANC's 'Operation Vula'. The operation aimed at smuggling disguised exiled ANC leaders back into South Africa. The secured communication network set up for this operation even enabled Nelson Mandela to maintain contact with the exiled ANC leaders from inside his prison.

The ANC theatre group Amandla performing in Amsterdam during a public hearing, organized by the AABN, on South Africa's aggression in Southern Africa, December 1983 (photo: Inge Goijaerts)

Meeting a terrorist

There remained a persistent current of feeling within Dutch society according to which Nelson Mandela, rather than being a freedom fighter, was a convicted criminal. In 1982, one of the organisations that were vocally supportive of the apartheid government lashed out at the idea of sending a delegation of Dutch parliamentarians to South Africa led by a known opponent of



Jan Nico Scholten

apartheid, Jan Nico Scholten, qualifying it as *'downright provocative,'* especially as *'Scholten (...) insists on meeting the terrorist Nelson Mandela.'*

In June 1983, a broad majority of MPs adopted a motion urging the Dutch government to ask the South African government to release Mandela and to tell the South African government and Mandela that the Netherlands was willing to grant him asylum. Further initiatives to put pressure on South Africa through sanctions or a ban on investment, except for one oil boycott motion proposed by Scholten, failed to win a majority during the same parliamentary debate on South Africa.

Mandela's fame widens

Anti-apartheid sentiments in the Netherlands were consistently most forcefully fuelled by developments in South Africa itself. In the mid-1980s the issue of apartheid re-entered the limelight in step with the growing internal opposition against apartheid repression inside South Africa. The figure of Nelson Mandela was increasingly given prominence in campaigns of the various anti-apartheid groups; accordingly, Mandela became ever more widely known.

Protests against Botha's visit to the UK at the British Embassy in The Hague, May 1984. The message was clear: don't talk with the apartheid regime, but with Mandela, as 'Botha = apartheid', 'Mandela = people of South Africa' (photo: Jan Stegeman)



As part of the boycott campaign against Kruger rands, the Holland Committee on Southern Africa (KZA) issued a 'Mandela medal', designed by the well-known Dutch artist Lucebert. The first medal was handed to Sindiso Mfenyana (ANC, Lusaka) on 21 October 1984 (photo: Jan Stegeman)

In the mid-1980s, the centre-right government of the day consciously opted for a wait-and-see approach when it came to applying pressure on the apartheid government. The Christian Democrat Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek saw no reason to cancel his visit to South Africa in August 1985, when president P.W. Botha refused to allow Van den Broek's EC delegation to meet Mandela. On South African television, the Dutch minister told viewers that he had intended to tell the jailed ANC leader that violence was not the way.



Working breakfast of Dutch Foreign Minister Van den Broek (far right) and his South African counterpart Pik Botha (left), Pretoria, 30 August 1985



Zindzi Mandela reading her father's message at a United Democratic Front festival, February 1985 (photo: Paul Weinberg)

South Africa's president P.W. Botha, hoping for Mandela's mythical stature to dwindle, had offered to release his troublesome prisoner on the condition that he renounced violence. A few months prior to the Van den Broek visit Mandela's answer had been read in public by his daughter Zindzi (23) at a mass meeting; Mandela said that he had no intention to

bow to Botha's demand, as it was Botha himself who must stop committing violence against the people of South Africa in the first place.

The Black King of South Africa...

By the mid-1980s, more and more Dutch newspapers wrote about Mandela. In August 1985 the daily newspaper NRC Handelsblad, not an obvious supporter of the cause of the liberation movements, featured a full-page portrait headed *'The Black King of South Africa'*, about *'a country under the spell of an unwavering couple.'* Now that Nelson Mandela was in jail, *'the banner of his pride'* had been *'taken over by his wife. She greatly contributed to the creation of the Mandela myth,'* thus the newspaper.

Here we find already all the later notions of Mandela as an *'ever growing legend'*, with his *'aura'*, his *'almost messianic glow'*, his *'blazon of self-sacrifice'*, his *'impressive personality'* and his *'dignity'*, presented in an unprejudiced report on the state of South Africa, devoid of any irony. The journalist, Allister Sparks, quotes a South African expert as saying that *'In a sense, the Botha government has become Mandela's prisoner.'* The government *'is forced into the paradoxical position of having to negotiate more or less publicly with its prisoner on the conditions under which the latter is willing to accept his release, and on the lines of action followed by his banned organisation,'* according to NRC Handelsblad.

...who one day will be president

In the case of other, more left-wing papers it was taken for granted that they would write on South Africa's freedom fighters with sympathy. Even so, the prediction made in the communist daily De Waarheid by veteran anti-apartheid activist Karel Roskam in September 1986 was a remarkable one: *'For those who stick to a view painted in black and white of the struggle against apartheid, the*

Mandela phenomenon remains a riddle. For everyone else he remains the man who one day will be president of South Africa – simply elected by the majority of the South African population.'



'The prisoner as a symbol of freedom...' by Karel Roskam, De Waarheid, September 1986

[Mandela's] manner [in court] can only be compared with that of Georgi Dimitrov confronting Goering in the Reichstag Fire Trial.

AABN especially remained fond of making references to World War 2, as exemplified by this quote from the AABN magazine Zuidelijk Afrika Nieuws ("Mandela: "I will return", June 1986).

The story of Winnie Mandela, who continued the fight of her husband and was regularly arrested, banned and in other ways harrassed, gained popularity in the Netherlands too, for instance after the publication of the Dutch translation of *Part of My Soul Went with Him* (Dutch: *Een stuk van mijn ziel*). In 1986 Winnie Mandela was awarded a honorary doctorate by Utrecht University.

Zenith of anti-apartheid activism

In the course of the 1980s a world-wide coalition, bringing together the ANC, the UN and other international bodies as well as the solidarity movement (broadly encompassing anti-apartheid groups, politicians, political parties, trade unions, churches and others up to and including sympathizing journalists), succeeded in promoting ever wider interest, also among the Dutch, in the struggle against apartheid.



In 1987 Dutch top football player Ruud Gullit contributed to spreading the fame of Mandela by dedicating his European Footballer of the Year award to Nelson Mandela.



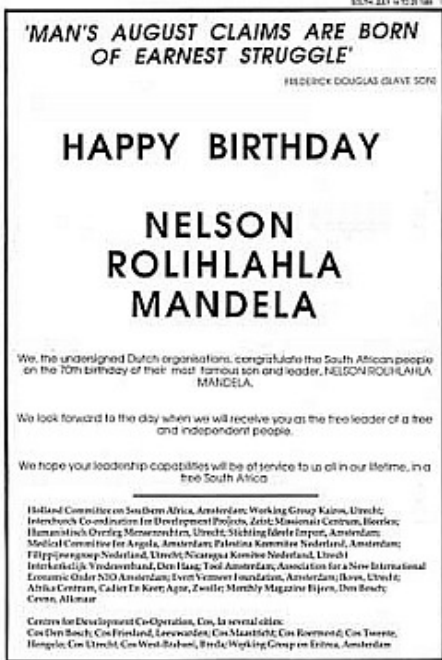
The climax of anti-apartheid action came on 11 June 1988, when 50,000 people joined a demonstration in Amsterdam, on the same day on which Mandela's imminent 70th birthday was celebrated with a 'Free Mandela' pop concert in London that was broadcasted across the world and also relayed by a popular Dutch TV channel.

On 11 June 1988, Allan Boesak, the renown South African anti-apartheid reverend, addressed the national BOTA demonstration; Mandela's portrait featured prominently on the platform and elsewhere (photo: John Brouwer de Koning)

Nelson Mandela's portrait figured prominently on posters, stickers and flyers for the national anti-apartheid demonstration, which was organized by the Dutch Broad Coalition against Apartheid (BOTA). Mandela's name wasn't even shown anymore, as everybody was now familiar with the name of the jailed black leader, and everybody knew his face.

Odes to Mandela

Activists had some trouble getting used to the fact that everybody now knew Mandela and admired Mandela. With mixed feelings, it was recalled years later in the AABN's magazine, *'the movement'* witnessed what it had stirred up. In 1988 no less than 150,000 people responded to a call to send birthday greetings to Mandela. The action unveiled the unexpected presence of a constituency of



The Dutch Broad Coalition against Apartheid congratulated Mandela in a South African newspaper ad (New Nation, 14 July 1988)

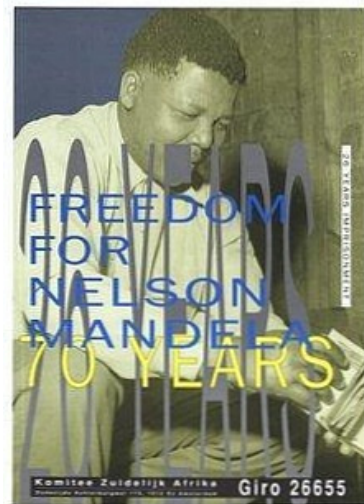
'decent people, more often than not of Christian inspiration, poles apart from the small band which had started the action as a chance to play just another trick on the propagandists of apartheid.'

The Dutch gesture made sufficient impression internationally to warrant inclusion in *Higher than Hope*, the acclaimed biography of Mandela by Fatima Meer. A South African newspaper, the *New Nation*, even mentioned a number of 170,000 Dutch letters and postcards sent to Mandela. Be it 150,000 or 170,000, AABN volunteer Dineke Posthumus personally handed eleven bags, appr. 200 kilogrammes in weight, of mail to Winnie Mandela in Soweto on 16 July 1988. In South Africa, Posthumus also had a chance to speak to Mandela's lawyer, Ismail Ayob, who showed her a copy of a Dutch literature textbook, read by Nelson Mandela on Robben Island: Mandela would certainly be able himself to read all the mail, even if written in Dutch!

Meeting Mandela in person

On the occasion of Mandela's 70th birthday, Dutch anti-apartheid magazines interviewed the ANC representative in the Netherlands on his personal recollections. Here was somebody who had intimately known Mandela! Kumar Sanjay had met Nelson Mandela in 1962 for the first time, at an underground meeting in Natal, he told Amandla, the KZA, Kairos and BOA magazine. Mandela had just returned from his travels abroad, where he had been received at the highest levels. *'The meeting was extraordinarily inspiring and exciting. He was a giant in a literal sense (...) but certainly also figuratively: a giant, a leader of our liberation army and of the movement.'*

Two days later, however, Sanjay had read the bold newspaper headlines: *'Africa's "Black Pimpernel" Arrested'*. Sanjay and his colleagues were left in shock: *'The underground movement lost its leader at a time when we actually still were novices, amateurs in the armed struggle.'* Later, Sanjay met Mandela again during their detention on Robben Island.



'Freedom for Nelson Mandela 70 Years — 26 Years of Imprisonment' KZA poster, 1988

Portrait

On the occasion of the large Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference in Amsterdam in December 1987, the AABN proudly issued a poster on which, according to a treatment popularized by the artists Joost Veerkamp and Marty Kuiken, P.W. Botha was metamorphosed into Nelson



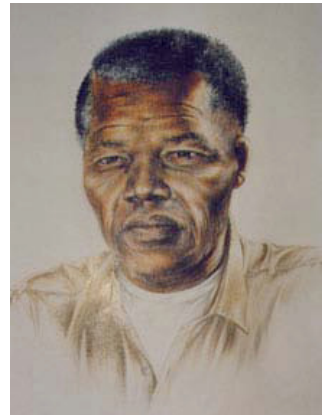
From the series 'Grimeren voor beginners' ('The starter's guide to make-up'): apartheid President P.W. Botha drastically rebuilt into ANC leader Nelson Mandela

Mandela. To the astonishment of AABN activists, some ANC members among the attendants were less amused by seeing 'their leader' associated in a perhaps too rude fashion to their most-hated adversary...

Everybody now knew Mandela, his name, his face. True or false? Mandela had been in jail for more than a quarter of a century; his portrait could not be shown in South Africa, while elsewhere no more recent pictures were known than those from the 1960s. The first attempt to update the outdated image was made

towards the end of 1988. Conny Braam, AABN chairwoman at the time, recalls that she once told Mandela's lawyer just how much she would have liked to see Mandela's actual face: *'I was fascinated that this Ismail Ayob actually saw him! That he went to Mandela's prison, sat at the same table with him... He then just lifted his eyes and told me, well, perhaps I could try and arrange something for you...'*

Ayob went on to ask an artist to produce a composition drawing, based on known old photos and witness reports from a number of people who had been allowed to visit Mandela in recent times. When Braam got Ayob's surprise gift, she arranged for it to be published in the Dutch weekly Vrij Nederland. Six months later, the South African press dared to test the law by publishing the forbidden 'Dutch' Mandela portrait.



Mandela and Botha

Over the years, through regular fund-raising campaigns both among their own donors and among the wider public, the major Dutch anti-apartheid groups had raised considerable amounts of money for the liberation movements. Each campaign went under a special slogan. Thus, in late 1987 funds were collected by KZA using the motto: WINNIE MANDELA ASKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT. In mid-1989 the campaign carried the slogan A BIRTHDAY PRESENT TO NELSON MANDELA; a cheque for no less than 250,000 guilders was handed to ANC president Oliver Tambo on 19 July 1989.



That same month, in South Africa, the oppositional Afrikaans weekly Vrye Weekblad published its own newly-drawn portrait of Nelson Mandela, which slightly differed from the Vrij Nederland drawing: *'This is how the man looks on whom rests the hope of millions of South Africans for a new, peaceful future. The man who drank tea with PW Botha before being sent back to jail.'* And

South, one of the South African newspapers that published Mandela's 'Dutch' portrait, asked: 'Is this the face PW saw?' – It had been a public secret for some time that negotiations were going on at the highest level: South Africa's 'Prisoner No. 1' was negotiating, on the conditions on which he was willing to be released, with President P.W. Botha, in the latter's official residence.

Mandela released

The world would soon learn what Nelson Mandela really looked like. A new South African president, F.W. de Klerk, did what his predecessor had never been able to do. He cleared the way for an eventual end to apartheid, first by releasing all the Rivonia prisoners except Mandela in October 1989, then, in February 1990, by unbanning the ANC and other organisations, and finally by releasing Nelson Mandela,



unconditionally. On Sunday afternoon, 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela walked from prison a free man, hand in hand with his wife Winnie. People in the Netherlands, as elsewhere in the world, sat glued to the television for hours to watch the event live.



In the evening Amsterdam's Dam square filled up with anti-apartheid activists celebrating the anti-apartheid hero's release in an unannounced demonstration of joy; next the crowd, headed by mayor Van Thijn, moved on to the city's second major square, Leidseplein. Only a few people vented their disapproval – one of them the

11 February 1990: AABN activists were joined by anti-apartheid veterans from the 1950s and 1960s in their office in Amsterdam, to witness Mandela's release live on television. Seated in the front middle is Amsterdam's mayor Ed van Thijn (CZA member in the 1960s); behind him is Stella Hilsum (co-founder of the committee in 1957). AABN chairwoman Conny Braam is seen cheering to the right of Van Thijn (photo: Jan Stegeman)

Amsterdam tram driver who grumbled about being forced to take a roundabout route 'because a black criminal was set free in South Africa.' A scuffle ensued between a black passenger and the driver, with angered passengers getting off the tram – 'A single false note which was not to disturb the merrymaking on Mandela Square,' a Dutch newspaper noted the next day.

Squares renamed

The Leidseplein in the capital was temporarily rebaptized 'Nelson Mandela Square' after Mandela's release. It was, Ed van Thijn recalls, 'a spontaneous action, sanctioned by mayor and aldermen.' Now mayor of Amsterdam, the former



On Mandela Square ('Boer Square' until 1987) in The Hague's 'Transvaal' district the ANC flag was hoisted on the day of Mandela's release

anti-apartheid activist Van Thijn proclaimed the new name from the balcony of the Municipal Theatre. A few more Dutch towns announced a temporary change of name of one of their squares to Mandela Square that week; local right-wing parties did not always agree.

Elsewhere in the Netherlands the renaming of a considerable number of squares, streets, bridges et cetera had already got off the ground a few years before Mandela's release, a process that has not yet ended.



Footballer Ruud Gullit greeting Nelson Mandela in Amsterdam, 1999



No visit to the Netherlands?

As in other countries, a committee had been formed in the Netherlands to welcome Mandela; the three major anti-apartheid organisations had invited a selection of Dutch celebrities to join. Footballer Ruud Gullit already acted as patron of the international 'Nelson Mandela Reception Committee' that had been set up in London after consultations with the ANC, together with, among other members, Willy Brandt, Jimmy Carter, Danielle Mitterrand, Lisbet Palme, Julius Nyerere and Desmond Tutu. Now, the Dutch groups, together with the ANC office in the Netherlands, started their deliberations on how Mandela would be welcomed to the Netherlands, preferably as soon as possible.

The first occasion presented itself after one month, when Mandela made a stop-over at Schiphol Airport on his way to ANC president Oliver Tambo in Sweden. The 'Welcome Mandela Committee' organized a press conference at the airport, which was, however, cancelled as too tiring for the 71-year-old. The Mandela couple were offered flowers, and officials of the Foreign Office, South African ambassador Albert Nothnagel and anti-apartheid activist Sietse Bosgra were given a chance to speak to Mandela, while the press got a photo opportunity.



Mandela at the European Parliament, Strasbourg, June 1990 (photo: Pieter Boersma)

A few months later, in June 1990, the Mandelas made a longer tour of Europe. According to the original schedule, no visit to the Netherlands was envisaged. *'Whence this ingratitude, or at least indifference towards Dutch anti-apartheid efforts,'* that had been greater than those of *'any other West European country?'* according to a prominent conservative newspaper columnist. Sietse Bosgra was compelled to put this *'persistent misunderstanding'* right, as he wrote in a letter to the editor, in which he referred to the position taken by the Netherlands in the UN in recent years: the Netherlands, under Minister Van den Broek, had in fact joined those Western nations that were conspicuous for their *'lack of effort towards the liberation struggle in South Africa.'*

Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek had tried to invite Mandela to the Netherlands to no avail; it was his colleague, Finance Minister Wim Kok, who succeeded in talking Mandela round, when the two met each other at a Socialist International meeting in Germany.

Exaltation

'Everybody wants to shake hands with charismatic ANC leader'. 'Left-wing and right-wing big shots assemble around Nelson Mandela'. After his visit to the Netherlands Nelson Mandela was showered, in newspaper headlines and editorials, in all the by now familiar exalting epithetics. The Mandela couple arrived Friday night, 15 June 1990. On Saturday they were received by the government as well as by Queen Beatrix and Prince Claus.



Amsterdam, Leidseplein: waiting for Nelson and Winnie Mandela, 16 June 1990

That same day Nelson Mandela met with activists from The Hague, gave a press conference, and was cheered by more than 20,000 when he and his wife Winnie appeared on the balcony of the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre. Some among the unsuspecting audience (*'Comrades!'*) were a bit bemused by Mandela's appreciative opening words about President De Klerk; it didn't prevent the spirits at Leidseplein from rising to a high.

Slavering on balcony

A representative of the Surinamese community in the Netherlands told afterwards that, while it was seen as natural that the 'white' CASA Choir should sing the 'black' anthem Nkosi Sikelele for Nelson Mandela at Leidseplein, it had taken more effort to persuade the organizers that a Surinamese music group should be given the opportunity to play as well. Anti-apartheid had been dominated by whites over the years, he said, and the anti-apartheid groups had grown into *'strongholds in which it is difficult for us to get a chance. This has now started to move, which is good now that we enter into the last phase of the struggle.'*



Mandela's speech, published by the Dutch ANC branch

The 'white' anti-apartheid groups were left with mixed feelings as well. Political heavyweights of all colours now crowded round Mandela. Anti-apartheid activists, having been consulted by the Dutch ANC office on the list of invitees to a lunch together with Mandela, had had to swallow hard on seeing some of the names, but had realized that *'the presence of some people may be of benefit.*

That's the game, and we just play along,' in the words of a AABN spokesman. AABN's chairwoman Conny Braam took less pains to hide her irritation, when she told a journalist that *'nobody knows better than I do that the ANC has always been execrated, approached extremely rudely and arrogantly, seen as a group of terrorists, as illiterate blacks spoonfed by Moscow. Now even right-wingers stand slavering round him on the balcony...'*



Nelson and Winnie Mandela leaving the Municipal Theatre in Amsterdam; seen to the left, applauding, Sietse Bosgra (photo: Marja Sonneveld)



Mandela and Wim Kok at the Labour Party (PvdA) meeting on 16 June 1990 (photo: Pieter Boersma)

Tireless old man

Later that afternoon, Mandela let himself be led by Wim Kok to a meeting of Kok's own Labour Party (*'coaxed along as a trophy,'* in the words of one newspaper). Anti-apartheid activists were invited to meet their hero in a side room. It was a festive day for everybody; everybody was overwhelmed.

One Dutch daily newspaper wondered: *'What on earth makes him keep going all day? One gets terribly exhausted just trying to keep pace with the Mandelas.'* The newspaper quoted a rare activist irritated by everyone's *'hanging on Mandela's words. He is just an old man, isn't he?'* Another newspaper pounced upon the suggestion: *'Mandela just an old man... How does one come up with such a thing?'*

If Nelson Mandela, the black fighter against apartheid, had crossed the Amstel last Saturday by walking on the water, his admirers wouldn't have been surprised. His charisma is amazing (...).

Opening words in *Algemeen Dagblad* (daily newspaper), 18 June 1990.

The importance of maintaining sanctions

Foreign Minister Van den Broek had called for the suspension of sanctions against Pretoria immediately after Mandela's release in February 1990, thus flying in the face of those who stressed how important it was, especially now, to keep up the pressure. At long last, there was optimism that the apartheid regime would be forced to bow to demands to open negotiations with its opponents. Mandela repeated this point in his talks with the Dutch government.

Those who consistently resisted the imposition of sanctions against Pretoria, are now the first to advocate their relaxation.

Comment by the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement in July 1990, referring to those government ministers and MPs who wanted to restore the suspended Cultural Treaty with South Africa.

The sanctions part of Mandela's message was duly picked up by some Dutch newspapers, while for KZA leader Sietse Bosgra the signal given to Dutch politicians that sanctions should be maintained was the greatest reason to be satisfied with Mandela's visit after all. 'Before his release, it used to be a moot point within the anti-apartheid movement whether or not his release would convey the wrong signal that "It's all over now, we have won"...,' said Bosgra, looking back on the visit.

Winnie Mandela's downfall

More visits to the Netherlands were to follow. On a later visit Nelson Mandela was accompanied by his future wife, Graça Machel, widow of the first Mozambican president, Samora Machel. For Winnie Mandela, things turned for the worse, not only in her marriage. She had earned respect, also in the Netherlands, for her uncompromising stand against the apartheid regime.



'Support the Winnie Mandela Fund'

But nothing is being heard anymore of the University of Groningen's 'Winnie Mandela Fund', the 'Winnie Mandela Community Centre' in Leiden, or former plans to rename a street in Amsterdam after Winnie Mandela. Similarly, Utrecht University is no longer shouting from the rooftops about the honorary doctorate it bestowed upon her in 1986.

Increasing numbers of disturbing reports reached the Dutch public over the years, beginning with Winnie Mandela's call to liberate South Africa 'with our matchboxes and necklaces' in 1986. Her appearance before archbishop Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997 completed the story of the tragic downfall of the former 'Mother of the Nation'.

De Klerk or Mandela?

Nelson Mandela, now a free man, had to be seen with fresh eyes too – besides De Klerk, or: instead of De Klerk? It was De Klerk who had ordered Mandela's release, but many in the Netherlands were unsure as to how to consider the reform president, who remained to be the

president of apartheid South Africa. De Klerk visited the Netherlands just a few months after Mandela. The Dutch government, for its part, still considered the white regime rather than the liberation movement as its principal interlocutor on the road to a non-racial, democratic society in South Africa.



'PRESSURE': Mandela pictured in a Dutch cartoon by Opland as telling Ministers Van den Broek and Lubbers, wanting to visit him in South Africa, 'Please, don't insist so much...' (de Volkskrant, 18 March 1992)

It came to a clash in early 1992, when Foreign Minister Van den Broek and Prime Minister Lubbers planned to visit South Africa without consulting, or even informing, the ANC; a Dutch government spokesman rubbed salt in the wound by declaring that state visits were arranged *'between legitimate governments.'* It was decided to cancel the trip when it became clear that Mandela refused to meet the Dutch.



De Klerk and Mandela

In October 1993, the Nobel peace prize ceremony honouring Nelson Mandela and President De Klerk was broadcasted live in the Netherlands. There were mixed feelings, however, about De Klerk sharing the prize with Mandela; the man who had released Mandela was also held responsible for the ongoing apartheid violence. One newspaper wrote that KZA was *'both happy and disappointed.'* Yet, most commentators endorsed the Nobel prize committee's view that one should look to the future.

Received on the highest levels

In striking contrast to all the years in which the threads connecting Nelson Mandela and the Netherlands had been woven by means of solidarity campaigns undertaken by activist groups, Mandela could now count on being received on the highest levels – it was patently obvious that here was a man who was tipped to be the president of the new South Africa. Activists could not help observing that some of Mandela's new friends suffered from selective memory, having forgotten that they had long considered Mandela a communist and terrorist.



The change was clearly visible in 1994 when, shortly before the elections which would make him president, Mandela visited the Netherlands again, in connection with a large fundraising campaign culminating in a TV show entitled *'Give South Africa a fair chance'*. The idea had been thought up by the anti-apartheid movement, but necessarily got its own momentum. For the dyed-in-the-wool Dutch anti-apartheid groups, which had a track record of success in raising sizeable amounts of money for the liberation struggle in

Mandela calls on Dutch businessmen to invest in South Africa (WTC Amsterdam, February 1994)

Southern Africa, to organize a fundraising and publicity campaign was right up their street. The aim this time was to support the ANC and the election process, by voter education and other means. Originally entitled *'Geef Mandela een stem'* (*'een stem'* in Dutch carrying the double meaning of 'a voice' and 'a vote'), the title of the campaign had to be changed when the ANC and Mandela agreed that Mandela himself would come to the Netherlands and appear on TV; a programme on national TV was not allowed to carry such a 'partisan' title. On 17 February 1994 the TV studio gallery was packed with anti-apartheid activists, while the cameras were focused on the VIPs, sports stars and

artists that had been invited to meet Mandela. During his stay, Mandela also met with government representatives and addressed an audience of business people.

Tributes to President Mandela

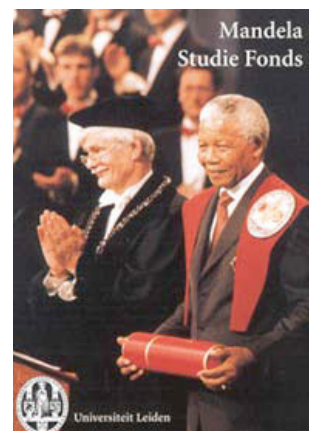
Mandela gaan Amsterdamse medalje ontvang

PRES. NELSON MANDELA gaan die Anne Frank-medalje van die Amsterdamse Anne Frank-Stichting ontvang.
Volgende dr. Martin Simon 'n

In Johannesburg in August 1994, Nelson Mandela, now President Mandela, received the Dutch Anne Frank Medal at the opening ceremony of a travelling exhibition on Anne Frank. In his word of thanks Mandela told how much inspiration the Robben Island prisoners had gained from reading Anne's Diary.

Beeld (South Africa), 9 August 1994

In March 1999, while on a state visit to the Netherlands, Mandela received an honorary doctorate from Leiden University; to further honour its guest, the university launched the Mandela Study Fund to enable South African students to come to Leiden to further their education. During his state visit Mandela also addressed both chambers of the Dutch parliament, he was knighted by Queen Beatrix and Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg, and he once again travelled to Amsterdam, where he was honoured with the city's Gold Medal and cheered by thousands during a canal trip.



Amsterdam was one of the strongest anti-apartheid cities in the world. That stands as a monument.

During his visit to the Dutch capital in 1999, Mandela once again thanked Amsterdam for the warm welcome the city had given him shortly after his release, on 16 June 1990.



From a series of Dutch stamps commemorating five highlights of Beatrix's first 25 years as queen (2005); Mandela's state visit to the Netherlands in 1999 was one of them

Unwavering solidarity

Shortly before the elections of April 1994 that made him president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela sent a video message to be played at the farewell reception for Ed van Thijn, who resigned as mayor of Amsterdam. This was one of the occasions when Mandela gave evidence of his appreciation of the solidarity he had obtained from the Netherlands before, during and after his imprisonment. Mandela recalled that Van Thijn *'during the dark days of apartheid'* had allowed the ANC to open an office in Amsterdam, *'and for the oppressed people of South Africa Amsterdam became a symbol of the commitment of the Dutch people to their liberation. I know that this commitment is unwavering and that the people of Amsterdam and the whole of the Netherlands will continue to contribute to the struggle for justice and democracy in my country.'*

A month later, Van Thijn played the video again to those present at the opening of the exhibition 'The Netherlands against Apartheid' in the Amsterdam Historical Museum, adding a nuance to Mandela's words: *'Don't let us congratulate ourselves. It was only a handful of Dutch who led the*

way in the fight against apartheid, and we owe it to them that Amsterdam became that kind of symbol,' thus Van Thijn.

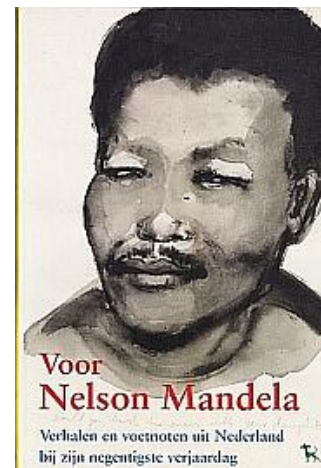


'NiZA congratulates South Africa! 10 years of freedom & democracy': façade of the NiZA office, Amsterdam 27 April 2004

Six years later, in 2000, the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA), successor to a number of former anti-apartheid organisations, was awarded the right to name a lecture series after Nelson Mandela, 'by way of thanks for several decades of Dutch support for the struggle against apartheid,' in the words of the retiring South African ambassador, Carl Niehaus. Since NiZA, after organizing 'Mandela Lectures' in 2003 and 2005, has narrowed down the focus of its activities, the series was discontinued.

On several occasions, however, through books, web dossiers and other means, the successors to the former activist organisations and magazines have shown that they haven't altogether shaken off the memory of all those years of campaigning for Nelson Mandela.

Nelson Mandela: Verhalen en voetnoten uit Nederland bij zijn negentigste verjaardag ('Nelson Mandela: Stories and footnotes from the Netherlands on his 90th birthday'), with contributions by a range of former leading Dutch anti-apartheid activists and others (2008). On the cover *Portrait of a young Nelson Mandela* ('Would you trust this man with your daughter?') by the South African-born Dutch artist Marlene Dumas (2004)



Unblemished image

The ANC, having been 'normalized' from liberation movement to political party after the elections, could no longer count on being considered with the same amount of sympathy it had evoked among the Dutch in the years up to 1994. But the image of its leader, Nelson Mandela, as the saviour of South Africa was not fundamentally challenged in the five years of his presidency.

In 1996, on the occasion of a state visit to South Africa by Queen Beatrix, Dutch reporters, with slight amusement, mentioned the grumbling of Dutch immigrants, for instance of a woman who had moved to 'fantastic' South Africa 42 years before and was now quoted as saying, 'Who on earth would ever choose a criminal to be president? We don't understand people in Holland are so thrilled about it.' In Holland itself, perhaps just a few eyebrows were raised over Mandela's speaking kindly about dictators of the likes of Gaddafi and Suharto, and in 1999 some people wondered why Mandela supported the ANC's quest for a two-thirds majority in the upcoming elections, which would enable the party to unilaterally change the Constitution – which seemed rather far removed from Dutch understandings of what democracy is about.

Apartheid is a Dutch word, and Verwoerd, the inventor of the policy of race segregation, was Dutch-born. The queen and her host, President Mandela, referred to these awkward facts. But Beatrix sought to strike a balance by drawing attention to the systematic rejection of the policy of apartheid by and in the Kingdom [of the Netherlands].

This did not sound very convincing. After all, for many years politicians have rather too cautiously concealed their rejection of apartheid in a 'critical dialogue'; the ANC was a controversial organisation, as was the anti-apartheid movement with its boycott campaigns; at the same time the business community – amply represented in the royal delegation – always stood by South Africa.

After a state banquet in Pretoria during the official visit of the Dutch Queen Beatrix to South Africa in 1996, the Dutch daily NRC Handelsblad spent a few critical words to the queen's dinner speech. Beatrix was accompanied by her son, Crown Prince Willem-Alexander, who had also attended President Mandela's inauguration in 1994.

In June 1999 Dutch newspaper editors made little effort to hide their regret: '*A Messiah goes into retirement*'. When the end of Mandela's presidency was imminent, the Afrikaner reverend Beyers Naudé – held in equally high esteem in the Netherlands – was quoted by a Dutch newspaper as saying that '*the president is the model of reconciliation. Mandela's feeling for "Afrikanerdom" is unprecedented. He commands great respect by succeeding time and again in acting as an intermediary between white Afrikaners and the rest of the population. (...) I don't find that charisma and conciliatory disposition in Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki.*'

Moral touchstone

When Thabo Mbeki made a state visit to the Netherlands in November 2004, there was not a spark of the enthusiasm that the visits of his predecessor had aroused. Mandela himself, in stark contrast, in his retirement continued to live up to his reputation, for instance when it came to the thorny issue of HIV/Aids. When, in an attempt to break the taboo, Mandela had summoned journalists to his home after his son Makgatho died, the contrast was laid bare in a Dutch newspaper headline: '*Mandela challenges Mbeki – Ex-president open about Aids killing his son, successor remains silent on national drama*'.



He is the universal teddy bear, canonized alive. In a world which since his release in 1990 has had to do without leaders, without ideology and without a compass, Nelson Mandela's role is that of a moral chief. Everybody wants to see him, everybody wants to be photographed with him and everybody wants to give him a prize.

De Gelderlander (Dutch daily) in 2002 on the occasion of the announcement that the International Four Freedoms Award was to be handed to Mandela in the Dutch town of Middelburg.

Numerous Dutch books and translations into Dutch of publications on Mandela have seen the light of day since the early 1990s, ranging from *Mandela: De geautoriseerde biografie* ('Mandela: The authorized biography') to *Mandela over leven, liefde en leiderschap: 15 inspirerende lessen* ('Mandela's Way: Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love, and Courage'). The Dutch musical *Amandla! Mandela* (2009), with a cast of Dutch, Surinamese-Dutch and South African actors, was hailed, rightly or wrongly, by the Dutch press as '*the world's first musical on Mandela*,' with a rather unlikely subject for a musical, as Mandela '*is a saint, and saints are uninteresting, from a dramatic*



Nelson Mandela in een notendop ('Nelson Mandela in a nutshell') by Ineke van Kessel of the Leiden-based African Studies Centre (2010)

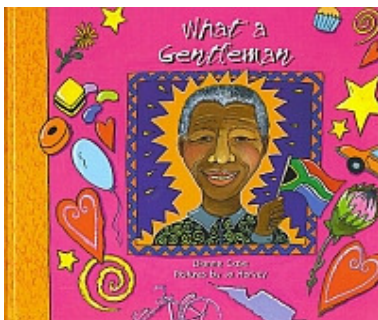
point of view. One reviewer thought the musical had '*made theatre history*' also by signifying the emancipation of black actors in the white-dominated world of the Dutch musical.

Mandela remained an influential point of reference. *'I was deeply moved by Obama's victory, a feeling which reminded me of the day Nelson Mandela was released in 1990'; 'Obama is above party, preaching reconciliation and being a bridge between the races – just like Mandela'* (Conny Braam and Ed van Thijn, respectively, in 2009).

After Jacob Zuma had taken office as the third black president of South Africa, a Dutch newspaper took a fresh view that *'Mandela cannot forever remain the measure of all things.'* But Nelson Mandela remained enduringly popular in Dutch public discourse as a touchstone against which the personalities and actions of others continued to be judged, from Jacob Zuma to the Dalai Lama and, most consistently, Mandela's former comrade-in-arms Robert Mugabe. At the same time, Dutch newspapers kept seizing upon all milestones and highlights – Mandela's 90th birthday, the 20th anniversary of his release, his public appearance at the 2010 World Cup, even his release from hospital in 2011 – to devote either small or full-page articles to the beloved hero.



'Twenty years of freedom for Mandela', Metro (front page), 11 February 2010



Financial support from four Dutch library institutions enabled the publication in 2008, in honour of the protagonist's 90th birthday, of the children's book *What a Gentleman* by Dianne Case and Jo Harvey, simultaneously in South Africa's eleven official languages

Web dossier The Netherlands and Nelson Mandela

The preceding pages offer a summary in English of two parts of the IISH web dossier on the Netherlands and Nelson Mandela, both in Dutch:

Webdossier Nelson Mandela en Nederland, part 1: Mandela in Nederland (Richard Hengeveld, 2006/2011) [available in pdf format from the site of the IISH]

Webdossier Nelson Mandela en Nederland, part 2: Mandela vrij! (Richard Hengeveld, 2006/2011) [available in pdf format from the site of the IISH]

For references, archives consulted and acknowledgements, see the Dutch texts referred to above.