World-famous politician and civil rights hero Nelson Mandela died on December 5 at age 95. For many years, Mandela fought to end racial segregation in his home country of South Africa. He became a hero to many all across the world.

“I am one of the countless millions who drew inspiration from Nelson Mandela’s life,” President Obama said on Thursday. “I cannot fully imagine my own life without the example that Nelson Mandela set.”

Mandela spent 27 years in prison because of his work to end apartheid.

FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS

Mandela was the most well-known leader of a revolution that ended apartheid. Apartheid (“being apart,” in the language of Afrikaans) was a brutal system of racial segregation in South Africa that kept blacks and whites apart.

Under apartheid, in a country that was 70 percent black, only whites could vote. Blacks were allowed very little schooling. They could not socialize with whites or even travel outside their neighborhoods without government permission. They could not run for office in the government.
South Africa’s government was controlled for many years by a white minority.

FROM PRISONER TO HERO

In the 1950s, Rolihlahla “Nelson” Mandela became the leader of a group in South Africa called the African National Congress (ANC). The group fought to end racial segregation. This put Mandela at the top of the government’s enemies list. He often had to live in hideouts and wear disguises. Activists like him were often beaten or murdered.

Mandela was accused of trying to overthrow the state, and, in 1964, he was sentenced to life in prison. But even there Mandela fought for justice. His struggle to change South Africa—even from inside prison—became famous across the world.

He wrote repeatedly to South African President F. W. de Klerk, asking to talk. With protests growing, the President agreed. For years, De Klerk met with Mandela and other black leaders in secret to talk about how to solve South Africa’s problems.

In 1990, De Klerk announced the end of apartheid. Mandela, then 71 years old, was finally allowed to walk free after spending 27 years in prison.

“NEVER AGAIN”

In 1993, Mandela, President de Klerk, and other South African leaders wrote a new **constitution** for the country. This document described a new vision for the nation and promised equality to all South Africans. The same year, Mandela and De Klerk won the Nobel Peace Prize for their work.
Mandela was elected President in the following year, when blacks were allowed to vote for the first time.

In his first speech as President, Mandela said, "Never, never, and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression [abuse or unfair rule] of one by another."

He served as his country’s first black President from 1994 to 1999. After his presidency ended, Mandela continued to fight political and cultural problems he thought were important. To many, Mandela will always be a symbol for peace, justice, and equality.

Taken from: