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TT Looking back, how do you see Nelson Mandela's leadership in the years he was president of the country?

Giving support

NDZ He combined his firm leadership with humanity. When it came to children he was very clear that the children of South Africa deserved a lot of attention, whether it was health, whether it was education or whether it was social issues. He also talked a lot about how you judge a society by the way it treats its children. For me that was a very important aspect because – this is my personal view – you couldn't be a leader of South Africa at that time if you didn't have that kind of compassion and understanding of the challenges facing especially the black people in South Africa.

If you recall, when we came into government, there was this issue of what we would do during the first hundred days. Amongst other things there would be free healthcare for children under six, and for pregnant woman; and free school feeding. One hundred days is very short and we had to see how we were going to implement these things. We had to meet with MECs and see what to do, but there were a few things that became very clear.

One, yes, we can open up the institutions but there just wasn't enough infrastructure to make that possible. So we had to then have a discussion to say, okay, we can easily say everyone under six can now have this, which we did, but having been around the country to see what was available, it was clear that we would have to build the health infrastructure especially at the local level very quickly if we were going to make that meaningful.

Then there were issues of budget, but he was very clear that that had to happen. So we had to be given the budget to build clinics and we had to find a way of building them quickly. We got permission to work with the CSIR to design three types of clinic: small, medium and health centre, so that we could save money and also do it quickly. With standard plans you don't have to have an architect drawing plans every time, and the decision would just be: what type of clinic of the three are we building at which place in which area and

then it would be built. They also did the quantity surveying, so that we built them knowing exactly how much we needed. We were able through his assistance as president to get the budget, because you know how difficult it is to get money out of government. But because he felt strongly about it we were able to get the money, use it very prudently, but also build very nice clinics that were the epitome of a new South Africa.

The second area where he demonstrated strong leadership was when it came to the school feeding. We had a problem because we felt that education had to deal with that, but the then minister of education said that he didn't have the capacity or the money to do it. But as an ANC cadre I felt it would be very wrong for Madiba to announce something and it doesn't get done. So we had again to rely on his leadership to get some money for it to be done in the first hundred days. We took it from the health side until education was ready, otherwise it would just be one of the things that Madiba announced and it didn't happen. He was helpful in making sure that we were able to get the support that we needed to do it.

TT Was that independent of the RDP office?

NDZ Well it was part of the RDP but the RDP office was not ready to give us the money. We had to talk to him as well, to say we need the money. The RDP had thought that because the previous government had something called the nutrition program, that that would be the program that could run it. But there wasn't much money in that program.

So he allowed you to do things but if you needed his support he was there for you, to intervene quietly and make sure that things do happen.

The other thing we also had to run was an immunisation campaign. He was invited to the US to address a program that was assisting medical students. It was a program that collected money in the US to train students in South Africa. It started during the apartheid days. They used to have a big meeting once a year that raises money and they invited him to go and address that meeting. He asked me to go but there was going to be a big problem because if I went there I could not be here for the launch of the immunisation programme. The only way I could do it would be if I flew Concorde, because with Concorde you could leave the US in the morning and be able to connect with a flight in London the same evening and arrive in South Africa, having spent just one night travelling. At that time, I don't think we had a regular evening flight from New York that could bring me here. This was just after Trevor had used the Concorde and there had been a big issue, so I said to Tata that 'The only way I can do it, is if I fly Concorde, and there has been a big issue about flying Concorde.' And he said 'No, for this one do fly Concorde, I want both things done, it is correct that you should be here to launch the immunisation

campaign', and I didn't have a deputy at that time, I was alone. So he said 'No, I will take the flak for you if people want to complain about you flying Concorde. Just do it!' Fortunately nobody complained.

That's what you need from a president – if you need to do something you just know that you have his support even if he would not come out publicly to support you, and then it is easy to do it.

There was another big issue that we had to deal with in health which in the end I had to take to Cabinet for support. Cabinet would not have supported without his support, but fortunately he supported. It was about the now Nelson Mandela Medical School in Umtata. At that time it was the Umtata Medical School. Medical schools fall under education, because it's higher education. So there was a big issue that it was not sustainable, it's not attracting good professors and other people to work there. There was a big lobby to move it to Port Elizabeth because PE didn't have a medical school, or failing that it should go to East London. So I put together a team led by Prof Hoffenberg to look at the pros and cons and the report came saying that in terms of rands and cents it is more cost effective to have it in Port Elizabeth, if not the second option would be East London. That is, if our only criterion is money – but if it is to improve the health services of that region then it is better to keep it in Umtata because when there is a teaching hospital the health services in that area improve. But it would cost us a bit more than if it was in PE. So my view was that we should keep it in Umtata, because part of the reason was to improve the health services that. But of course it was not an easy argument because it involved money and there was the big lobby for it to go.

But again I talked to him before to say 'These are the issues but I will be pushing the line that it should stay even if it is more expensive because actually we will save more money by improving the health services there, will save more than we would be putting in. If you just look at what you are putting in without looking at the impact then it looks expensive.' And he was okay with that and that is why we still have it. But because the white people who were the majority in terms of professors and doctors and so on more or less boycotted working there, we had to get 24 or 25 professors from Cuba to go and work there and from other countries as well until we would be able to attract South Africans. But he was okay with that.

TT What you are conveying is that he was very much engaged in making sure that programs happened. Did that change over the five years, was he more engaged in the beginning?

NDZ Yes, I think for me he was more engaged at the beginning, but, maybe it was because I engaged him more at the beginning as I myself was not

experienced, I engaged both of them actually, the deputy president and himself.

Even on the question of the Nkosi Albert Hospital and on the question of tobacco. De Klerk called me to his office to say, 'You must stop this nonsense of tobacco because it's going to put the farmers out of work and it is not necessary.' Then he told me that I must build the Pretoria Hospital. So I said to him, 'Well the first one I have to build is the medical school here in Durban because King Edward is a mess and its training of medical students is actually a disgrace.' There was a report of an investigation that his own government had done that said King Edward was not fit to train medical students but he had not done anything. So that was the first hospital I must build. He told me well, Pretoria is Afrikaner heritage and he is going to fight for it in Cabinet, and I told him, 'It's fine, you can fight for it.' I didn't tell Tata because I didn't think it was necessary. On the tobacco thing I told him that I was the Minister of health and I had the responsibility for the health of the country – farmers could plant other things, there's no land in South Africa that can only grow tobacco. 'We will have programs together with the Minister of Agriculture to help farmers shift from tobacco to other crops.'

I didn't tell Tata, I don't know who told him, I told some colleagues but didn't tell him as I didn't think it was necessary. But one day he called me in and said, 'I hear that De Klerk called you in and said these things.' I said, 'Yes.' He asked, 'Why didn't you tell me?' I said, 'I didn't think it was something I needed to involve you in, I didn't need your decision on anything.' Then he said, 'No, you must tell me if he calls you again, but I have told him that he must never do that; he must never call my ministers and tell them whatever.' So he was quite angry with De Klerk and intervened.

For me he was really a pillar of strength in terms of being able to do the things that were maybe sometimes controversial, like tobacco, and Thabo also. There was lots of information coming out that if we didn't tackle the tobacco issue, then around 2020 or so there would be more people dying from tobacco-related deaths than were being killed by AIDS. So it was very important that we did not wait until we get to that time and find ourselves with big problems.

If you were able to explain your case in terms of what program you are doing he would be very supportive.

There were even programs we did using his name, such as the TB programme in which we used his picture when we were trying to educate people that you must take your tablets for the duration of the treatment, because people would just take the tablets until they feel better and then stop. Because he had had TB himself it was easy for us to actually use his example.

He was very supportive of the programs that we did in Health. For instance, we also worked with the defence force when we were doing immunization and even though the president didn't have to sign anything, we just had to inform him that we were wanting to work with the defence force.

Another area was when there was the nurses' national strike in 1995. They wanted huge salary increases and all that. It started when I was in Beijing for the women's conference. The conference was about three weeks but I had intended going there for the first 10 days and then coming back. But when the nurses' strike came there was a big outcry that I must come back, including from my DG. But when I spoke to Tata he said, 'Don't come back, even after the 10 days, you must stay to the end because we mustn't give any impression that there is a big crisis. There is an acting minister, the acting minister must deal with it, you shouldn't come back. You must now stay to the end. If you come back it will be like you're coming back for the strike.'

He was very supportive with regard to access to treatment. Even on the issue of pharmaceuticals, there was a difference between ourselves and the Department of Trade and Industry but in the end our view was supported and that's why we could get that bill through. The drugs in South Africa were artificially expensive. It was not as if they were sold at a price that was reasonable. What the pharmaceutical companies were doing, they segmented the market. A drug would cost something here, the same drug from the same company would cost less say in Australia. I think in South Africa they put us in a segment based on the income of whites, and you find that the drugs in South Africa were even more expensive than the drugs in Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and sometimes even the US. So we were saying this cannot be right. So in the end everybody was supportive, because if you recall, the Americans even threatened to put us under sanctions, they had already put us on Watch 301, which is where they put countries that are just one layer before they put you under sanctions. So if both the deputy and the president were not supportive, this matter could not have been allowed to continue, it was putting the country at risk. But I told them, 'They will never put us under sanctions because they know we are right.' So he was supportive, both of them were supportive. He may not have known all the details but he was supportive.

Even on the issue of termination of pregnancy, he was interacting with a lot of chiefs and people were very conservative. I remember, he asked Comrade Stofile when he was premier to organise a meeting of all the chiefs of the Eastern Cape so that I can address on this matter. So I went and addressed them.

I think it would be a wrong impression to say he didn't know what was going on. He may not have been hands-on in terms of talking to the media about it

or whatever, but for us, at least for me, he was very much aware of what you were doing

Sarafina

And then there were issues like Sarafina which you mentioned.

I briefed the two of them – president and deputy president – what we were trying to do and what process we had followed and I told him, 'If you think I was wrong I'm ready to resign, because I don't want to put you into trouble.' He said, 'No, if you didn't steal any money and this is what you are trying to do, I don't see why you should resign.' That was a tough one because, you will recall, it was made a big issue.

I remember that I hadn't realised how worried my mother was about this issue. One weekend I came back home to see her because she had been somehow withdrawn, not the normal bubbly person that she was, but I couldn't put a finger on what the problem was, she wasn't ill. Until one afternoon I came from Cape Town and I found her very happy. And she said, 'Well, that's because Madiba has clarified this matter.' I asked, 'How?' She said, 'I heard on the radio.' He was speaking in Pietermaritzburg. I think it was at a meeting with some business people and they asked him about this issue and what was happening – some people were thinking maybe I should have been sacked. But he clarified to them that as far as he was concerned there was nothing wrong that I did and so he's not going to do anything against me on that matter. I hadn't heard it but my mother heard it on the radio and told me.

His leadership was that if he believed in something he stood by it.

TT Regarding the difference with the portfolio committee over Sarafina, there was a media report saying he intervened with the committee and told them to stop the investigation – it was refuted the next day in a joint statement by the president and deputy president. These tensions arose from time to time between portfolio committees and ministers, and he would try to help resolve them. Did he try to smooth things between Manto as the chair of the committee and yourself?

NDZ I don't know, he might have done that, he didn't tell me that, so I wouldn't know. I don't know whether Madiba intervened or not, but if he did I think Manto didn't listen because the matter continued in the portfolio committee. But he never told me that he was going to intervene on my behalf. But knowing him, he probably did. So I wouldn't say definitely not. But he didn't show that he had intervened.

What I do know is that the portfolio committee dealt with the matter, the public protector dealt with the matter, there was another team that was put together that dealt with it within government; eventually it went to Judge Heath

Heath did his investigations including interrogating me and then for a long time never concluded the matter, but it kept popping up and at that time he was investigating thieves so the impression was that I must have stolen money because the matter was with Heath. But he wasn't completing it and I took him to court and applied for a court interdict for him to conclude the matter one way or the other, not to stop it, but to conclude it one way or another, whether I was guilty or not guilty. The court ruled in my favour and said, yes this matter had been going on for too long and he must conclude it and gave him timeframes. But he didn't start and instead asked my lawyer, can I guarantee that I'm not going to sue him because he had no case. So I said I would not sue him' only because if I sued I would have to get the money from the government because he was working on behalf of the government. Secondly he asked if we could have a joint press conference, and I said 'No, I've never heard of the accused and the judge having a joint press conference.'

Impact on OAU

TT Looking briefly at international issues, what impact might Mandela have had on the OAU and the African Union?

NDZ First, I think his coming into the OAU had a profound influence in the OAU itself, because here was a man that the OAU over the years and the member states had worked with right at the beginning when Umkhonto WeSizwe was established. He had been to many countries before his arrest. And when he was imprisoned the OAU played an important role both in the campaign for his release and the release of other political prisoners, as well as supporting the struggle in South Africa. So for this man who was also a world icon to be part of the OAU had a tremendous impact.

But also I think he brought his own thinking into the OAU. He brought his own thinking, in terms of looking at issues of development now that decolonisation was more or less over, bringing social and development issues in general, but also bringing a sense that Africans had to be a bit more independent.

Madiba was also very outspoken, including that people mustn't hold onto power forever. You can see the impact that he had from the fact that when he died they named the plenary hall in Ethiopia at the AU headquarters, the Nelson Mandela Hall, because, they argued, he embodied everything that Africa should be or should be doing. You also find that sometimes when issues are discussed, they will recall, 'Oh, Madiba's intervention in the Ouagadougou meeting', 'Remember his intervention in some other meeting', even now. Some of these interventions were not necessarily made in a public speech but were made in the plenary discussions.

But I would say that he had a tremendous impact worldwide, not just in the OAU. But he participated actively in the OAU and SADC.

Non-sexism

On the issue of women, he was very good. I remember when we went to Beijing I was asked to lead the delegation. I went to him separately and I went to Comrade Thabo and I asked 'Is there any particular thing, any tram lines which I should not go beyond?' and both of them said, 'Well, you know the women's issues, you know the government stand and the ANC stand on non-sexism, so you have a blank cheque.' I found that very interesting, but I also found that we were the only delegation that did not have a male in it. In many of the countries' delegations the lead negotiator was a man. That also showed that he had a very progressive attitude towards women and had confidence that women knew what they want, and that they must fight for it, they must do it and not be held back.

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He would meet you and not only ask about your work but also ask about the family. He was very humane. That also makes a big difference.