**Statement by Miss Shorna-Kay Richards**

**Deputy Permanent Representative of Jamaica**

**UNGA Commemorative Meeting to honour Nelson Mandela**

**Thursday, 19 December 2013**

Mr. President,

This is a poignant moment, as I stand here to pay tribute to and remember the life of a giant of humanity, Nelson Mandela. Madiba or Tata, as he was affectionately known had the distinct ability to make us all feel like one human family; to seek the best in ourselves; and to feel the hope that while we come from different backgrounds and cultures, we could indeed work towards and acheive a harmonious society based on mutual respect for all, inclusiveness, justice and peace.

I therefore join other speakers in offering condolences to Madiba's family. Along with his fame and celebrity, and the feeling that he belonged to us all, it is fitting to remember that he was first of all a man - father, husband, grand and great-grand father, family member. Their loss is even more acute and so we pray for their comfort during these difficult times.

To the nation of South Africa, we also offer words of comfort as we know the significant role Madiba continued to play even after retirement from office as the father of the Nation, an icon of reconciliation and justice and an inspiration to action. We also share in this loss and we encourage us all to take the chief lessons from Madiba's life, including in our work here at the UN.

Jamaicans feel a special bond with Mandela and all South Africa. As one of the first countries to impose trade sanctions on Apartheid South Africa in 1957, Jamaica’s anti-apartheid activism preceded our own independence from Great Britain. These sanctions remained in place in the decades that followed, throughout the heights of the anti-apartheid struggle on the ground in South Africa, and until the end of apartheid rule.

That Jamaica became an active part of the anti-apartheid struggle is also due in part to the anti-apartheid message that formed part of seminal Jamaican Music which galvanized the country in support of the struggles of our brothers and sisters in South Africa. Artistes such as the legendary Bob Marley and the Wailers with the anthemic “**War”**, which was an adaptation of Haile Selassie’s 1963 speech to the United Nations General Assembly; and Peter Tosh’s “**Apartheid”**.

Mandela's struggle became our struggle. And so we felt honoured and blessed as a country to have hosted Mr. Mandela on our shores, on two occasions following his release after twenty seven years of imprisonment: first in 1991 and later in 1998, during his term as President of the Republic of South Africa.

Jamaica and all Jamaicans are proud of the difference our voice has made on the wider international stage in the fight to end apartheid.  We have carried on that pride through engaging the annual Nelson Mandela Day activities on July 18. Undoubtedly, the act of selfless giving to those in need on Nelson Mandela Day will take on even greater significance.   It would be a true tribute to his memory if we give of our time and effort, as he requested, in all aspects of our everyday life.

As we say farewell to the icon of the anti-apartheid movement, let us reflect on the traits that made him the man that he was, the man that many have strived to emulate.

*He was by no means a perfect man, as he himself has readily admitted, but he was a principled man, a man who strove for justice, truth, and freedom; a man who believed in the inherent good of all human beings of all races and creeds; a man who established bonds rather than festered divisions; a man who preached tolerance and forgiveness.*

Mandela leaves behind a rich and diverse legacy, not only in South Africa but also around the world. And while Madiba insisted that we not focus only on him, we can certainly build on his legacy in our work. Even as we set about the business of discussing the important issues before us, such as crafting the post-2015 development agenda; promoting human rights; advancing the rule of law; protecting the vulnerable; preserving the planet; and addressing HIV/AIDS, let us remember what Madiba has taught through his life - unity, tolerance, respect, humilty, humanity.

Mandela’s rest has come, our long walk continues.