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Lubna K. Al-G...

Let's Celebrate
Mandela
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UAE pays tribute to Mandela's magic

Former statesman is turning 93 but he still inspires social change

Caline Malek

ABU DHABI // The UAE will be wishing Nelson Mandela a happy 93rd birthday by involving its residents in community work and sending him the nation's greetings.

A 20-metre canvas portraying the story of the South African political prisoner turned president will be on display at Khalidiya Mall in Abu Dhabi from July 12 to 18.

Members of the public will be able to sign the canvas, set up by Nahtam Social Responsibility, an organisation that works to address the social needs of people in the UAE and poor people around the world. The South African Embassy and the South African Business Council have also contributed to the initiative.

"July 18 is Nelson Mandela's 93rd birthday," said George Itty, the chief executive of Nahtam, "and all countries where the UN is involved around the world will celebrate".

The canvas will also be signed by officials who will write personal messages to Nelson Mandela, before it is sent to South Africa.

Mr Itty said Sheikha Lubna Al Qassimi, the Minister for Foreign Trade, signed the canvas and wrote a message.

The scheme will also pay tribute to the former president's 67 years of humanitarian work.

"We will request people to do 67 minutes of community work this month, and there will be a list of 67 ways to do it," said Mr Itty. "This can be in their office, at home or

anywhere convenient to them".

The project will present Mr Mandela's community work as an example for young people in the UAE. "I feel the youth here need more motivation to do community work," Mr Itty said. "They should get more involved in that sense because the government cannot do everything.

"It's a good thing for the coming generation to have social responsibility that can ease the pressure of their daily life."

Once the community work is completed, people, organisations and institutions that took part in it will be asked to document and send their experience to Nahtam.

The top 67 works will be published in a book that will be entitled *67 Inspiring Stories - For the People By the People of the UAE* in October. It will be presented to Mr Mandela as a gift.

Mr Itty said he expected at least 10,000 visitors to enter the mall daily, "which means it will be viewed by a huge number of people".

Nelson Mandela was born in rural Transkei on July 18, 1918. By the time he had turned 80, the man known as Madiba, his clan name, had endured enough hardship for a thousand lives. In 1998, he was president of South Africa, a position he assumed after serving 27 years in prison for his defiance of the racist apartheid system.

In his capacity as his country's first black head of state, he worked to overcome the lingering racial prejudice created by decades of segregation.

Mr Mandela served one term as president before retiring from office in 1999 and has since focused on promoting South Africa and his charitable activities.

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