**Remembering Tutu**

[**Najm us Saqib**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/najm-us-saqib)

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South Africa is a beautiful country. So are its people. To me, South Africa is the only European country which is situated in Africa. Three of the top-most items on my checklist before departing for South Africa in 2014 were to visit Robben Island and have a peek into Nelson Mandela’s long incarceration; have a stroll in that famous Soweto Orlando West Street where two Nobel Laureates, Mandela and Tutu, used to reside; and, visit Mamelodi to learn how some brave people facing extreme poverty could still dream about life. The first weekend was spent in and around Robben Island and in the next year or so, I was able to tick the other two boxes as well. The busy schedule did not allow me to tick a couple of other important boxes but High Commissioner Madikiza has promised to help me in following my bucket list.

I had heard about Desmond Tutu but it was only during my tenure as Pakistan’s High Commissioner in South Africa that I was properly introduced to this five feet five inches tall giant of a personality with a perpetual smiling face and infectious laughter.

[UK government urged to provide safer routes for refugees](https://nation.com.pk/05-Jan-2022/uk-government-urged-to-provide-safer-routes-for-refugees)

The end of apartheid and the introduction of a multi-racial democracy in South Africa in the early 1990s are attributed to Nelson Mandela but he was not alone in the struggle against oppression. Tutu was there too, to visualise and dream about his country’s true soul and texture. Tutu would be remembered as one of those visionary world leaders who challenged the status quo and changed the course of history. He was ‘the face of the anti-apartheid movement abroad’ and ‘the moral compass of the nation.’ As a diehard human rights activist, he was against the tyranny of the white minority as well as the black political elite. His iconic status in the checkered history of South Africa could be rivaled only by Mandela, his compatriot and a long time friend. He passed away last week at the age of ninety after ensuring his country was completely out of the satanic clutches of apartheid and millions had the opportunity to breathe freely as respectable black Africans in South Africa.

[PSG goalkeeper Donnarumma contracts COVID-19](https://nation.com.pk/05-Jan-2022/psg-goalkeeper-donnarumma-contracts-covid-19)

President Ramaphosa has termed him as part of ‘a generation of outstanding South Africans who have bequeathed us a liberated South Africa.’ Other world leaders have described him as ‘a universal spirit’ and that he was ‘grounded in the struggle for liberation and justice in his own country, but also concerned with injustice everywhere’ and his legacy will ‘echo throughout the ages’ and ‘a man who tirelessly championed human rights in South Africa and across the world.’ That is true. His voice was heard even beyond African borders when he vehemently supported the Palestinian cause; condemned Trump’s decision to officially recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital; opposed the Iraq War; and, urged Aung San Suu Kyi to have the persecution of Muslim Rohingya minority stopped.

Recipient of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prise and more than 100 honorary degrees at home and abroad, the outspoken Tutu was endured equally by the black and white population of a visibly divided nation. Being the first black African Bishop and Archbishop, he had the unique distinction of fusing ideas from black theology with African theology. Standing out as one of the most prominent opponents of South Africa’s racial segregation and white minority rule, he would stress non-violent protests as the plausible way to get rid of oppressors while having complete understanding of the black African psyche of being violent when all non-violent ways would fail against tyranny.

[EU top diplomat, NATO chief discuss European security](https://nation.com.pk/05-Jan-2022/eu-top-diplomat-nato-chief-discuss-european-security)

Like any other such leader under repressive regimes, he led protests which many whites also participated in; got arrested; had his passport confiscated twice; still travelled widely; and, used his knowledge and skillful oratory to convince the regional and world leadership that only the international community could ‘forcefully save’ the people and help establishing a non-racial, democratic, participatory and just South Africa. In doing so, he somewhat paved the way to the demise of apartheid. Addressing the political committee of the UN General Assembly, he urged the world to impose sanctions on South Africa if apartheid was not dismantled. In the US, he would be compared with Martin Luther King Jr.

In 1998, as Tutu presented the five-volume report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Mandela, he warned that ‘yesterday’s oppressed can quite easily become today’s oppressors’. As it happens to all idealists and perfectionists, he could neither see his dream of a ‘Rainbow Nation’ coming true in his lifetime nor addressed the inequalities and poverty, a fact he regretted during his last years.

[Bilal Yasin case: Police arrests Sajid under murder charges](https://nation.com.pk/04-Jan-2022/bilal-yasin-case-police-arrests-sajid-under-murder-charges)

Tutu’s detractors would call him ‘a communist sympathiser’ and treat his extremely sensitive, easily hurt and easily offended demeanour as weaknesses. His close associates would agree that Tutu had always detested discourteous behaviour, swearing and ethnic slurs. According to his own admission, his desire to be loved was a ‘horrible weakness’ as he would react to emotional pain in an ‘almost childlike way.’ To some, his ‘weaknesses’ actually were instrumental in his understanding of the true nature of human sufferings. No wonder he believed the dying people should have the right to choose how and when they leave Mother Earth.

Tutu once observed, ‘When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, let us pray. We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.’ This lament filled with African wisdom reminds me of the East India Company and what it did to history and the people of the sub-continent. I am sure Tutu was not referring to the present geo-strategic environment in our region when he advised, ‘If you want peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.’ And certainly, he was not referring to today’s Pakistan when he warned that ‘the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.’