

From VOA Learning English, this is As It Is. I'm June Simms in Washington.

And I'm Mario Ritter. Today on the show we talk about the life of South African leader Nelson Mandela. The former president and Nobel Peace Prize winner died on Thursday at the age of 95.

South Africa will hold a period of mourning unequalled in the nation's history in honor of anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela. Mr. Mandela successfully led the effort to end South Africa's racial separation laws and white supremacy policies.

Crowds quickly gathered outside Mr. Mandela's home in Johannesburg to leave flowers, candles and notes celebrating the life of the man. People sang, danced and expressed their respects in the South African tradition.

On Thursday, President Jacob Zuma announced that Mr. Mandela, the country's first black president, had "passed on peacefully" in the company of his family.

Dressed in black, Mr. Zuma said South Africa had "lost its greatest son and our people have lost a father." Like many South Africans, Mr. Zuma called the anti-apartheid leader by his clan name, Madiba.

“That is indeed the moment of our deepest sorrow. Yet it must also be the moment of our greatest determination. A determination to live as Madiba has lived, to strive as he has strived and to not rest until we have realized his vision of a truly united South Africa, a peaceful and prosperous Africa, and a better world.”

President Jacob Zuma said the nation will hold a series of memorials leading up to Mr. Mandela's burial on Sunday, December 15. The family will hold the private burial ceremony in his ancestral home town of Qunu, in Eastern Cape.

“We will spend the week mourning his passing. We will also spend it celebrating a life well-lived, a life that we must all emulate for the betterment of our country and Africa. Long live Madiba.”

The week of events begins this coming Sunday, with a national day of prayer.

On Tuesday, public services will be held at the Soweto soccer sports center. The event is expected to draw huge crowds. Many world leaders and celebrities are expected to attend.

Mr. Mandela's last public appearance was at the Soweto Stadium on the final night of the World Cup soccer championship in 2010.

Slowly, the weak, white-haired old man made his way around the field on a little golf cart. He waved, and smiled -- and the entire stadium went wild with joy.

His body will next lie in state for three days in Pretoria's Union Buildings, Mr. Mandela headquarters as South Africa's first black president. At the same time, South African provinces will hold their own memorial services for the leader who was respected around the world for his activism.

Mr. Mandela spent nearly thirty years in prison for his part in fighting to end white minority rule and official discrimination against blacks in South Africa.

After his release, he arose as a respected symbol of peace and reconciliation and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. The following year, he became South Africa's first black president.

"Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another."

Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918 in Transkei, South Africa. He was a member of the Madiba tribe. The Christian school where he began his education gave him the name Nelson. The young Mandela was a good student and went on to a respected secondary school.

He started college in 1939. However, he was dismissed from school the next year because he took part in a student protest. It was also around this time that he started attending African National Congress meetings. Mandela officially joined the ANC in 1944 and helped form the ANC Youth League.

For the next 20 years, Nelson Mandela rose in the ANC. He helped it develop more policies of stronger resistance to apartheid. He took part in civil disobedience campaigns. He formed a law firm. He was arrested several times. He became president of the organization.

But in 1964 he was found guilty of sabotage and other treasonous actions. The court sentenced him to life in prison. Mr. Mandela was placed in Robben Island where he remained for the next 18 years.

The conditions were terrible at Robben Island, especially for political prisoners. Mr. Mandela became sick with tuberculosis during his time there. He dealt with serious lung infections for the rest of his life.

But even prison did not stop his activism.

Finally, in 1990, South African President F.W. de Klerk ordered Nelson Mandela's release from prison. He also legalized all political parties.

Four years later, South Africa held its first racially open presidential election. And Nelson Mandela became the country's first black president.

Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk were named joint winners of the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for their work toward peace in South Africa. After receiving the award, Mr. Mandela praised the people of his country.

“All have created a society which recognizes that all people are born equal.”

That's As It Is for today. In the News is coming up next with reaction to the death of Nelson Mandela. For more news on the South African leader visit [voanews.com](http://voanews.com). I'm June Simms. And I'm Mario Ritter.