

Mandela remains in a `serious but stable` condition, govt says

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USPA News - Former South African President Nelson Mandela remains in a serious but stable condition, a government spokesman said Monday as the anti-apartheid icon spent a third day at an undisclosed hospital for a recurrence of a lung infection. Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said the condition of Mandela, who is 94, has remained unchanged since he was hospitalized at a Pretoria hospital during the early morning hours of Saturday.

At the time the government described the former leader's condition as "serious but stable." "President Jacob Zuma reiterates his call for South Africa to pray for Madiba and the family during this time," Maharaj said, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. He earlier said the former leader is receiving expert medical care and added that doctors are doing everything possible to make him better and comfortable. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who was married to Nelson Mandela from 1957 until March 1996, visited him in hospital on Monday but made no public statement. Meanwhile, the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's governing political party, rejected media reports that claimed the Mandela family had barred senior party leaders and government officials from visiting the hospital. "We have spoken to the family about this report and they deny that they issued such an instruction or spoken to the media on barring the ANC and government from visiting Madiba," ANC spokesman Jackson Mthembu said. Mthembu explained that there are general hospital restrictions that permit only close people to visit the former leader. "We call on all media houses and journalists to treat Madiba's health as a serious matter and stop making unwarranted speculations," he said, urging the media to give the Mandela family their privacy. Also on Monday, the foundation of South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu sent its blessings to the doctors and nurses who are responsible for Mandela's care. "As the beloved father of our nation, Nelson Mandela once again endures the ravages of time in hospital," a statement said. "We offer thanks to God for the extraordinary gift of Mr. Mandela, and wish his family strength." Thandi Modise, premier of South Africa's North West province, described Mandela as a unifier and a symbol of reconciliation. "Though we know that he is not immortal like all of us, we are inspired by his fighting spirit and wish his family all the strength for them to unite in love and continue to give him all the support he needs," she said. Modise added: "We are confident that he is receiving the best medical care and treatment that the best of our facilities and medical specialists have to offer. Though we should appreciate that there are a few people the world over who match Madiba's stature as the greatest freedom fighter and statesman the world has known, the zeal to keep the public informed about his condition should not erode his dignity." The anti-apartheid icon has been hospitalized several times in recent months, raising concerns about his health condition. Mandela was hospitalized for more than a week in late March, also for a recurrence of a lung infection, and doctors withdrew excess fluid that had accumulated in the space surrounding his lungs. After the procedure in late March, the government revealed Mandela was able to breathe without difficulty, even though Maharaj had previously made no mention of breathing problems and instead said the former leader was in "good spirits" and "making steady progress." The government has been repeatedly criticized for being reluctant to provide more specific details about Mandela's situation, causing uncertainty. Earlier in March, Mandela spent about 24 hours in hospital for what the government described as a `scheduled medical check-up` to manage existing conditions in line with his old age. Officials at the time assured Mandela was "well" but refused to provide more specific details about the nature of the visit. Mandela was also hospitalized in December 2012 for what was later revealed to be a recurrence of a previous lung infection. The anti-apartheid icon also underwent a successful procedure on December 15 to remove gallstones which were discovered while Mandela was undergoing tests. The hospitalization in December lasted for more than three weeks. Major South African news organizations harshly criticized the government's handling of information relating to Mandela's hospitalization, complaining that the government did not act on a previously developed protocol that would have ensured the former leader's privacy while keeping South Africans informed of major developments. Before being elected as president, Mandela was a strong anti-apartheid activist and the leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress. He spent 27 years in prison after being convicted and sentenced to life in prison on charges for sabotage and other crimes. Much of his prison term was served on Robben Island. Mandela was released on February 11, 1990, and became president only four years later, leading the country with a multi-racial administration to end the apartheid. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk were jointly awarded the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa.

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