

Beat: Vips

Mandela much better now; after week in hospital

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USPA News - The condition of former South African President Nelson Mandela is continuing to improve and doctors say he is "much better now" than when he was admitted to hospital, the government said on Wednesday, as the anti-apartheid icon spent a seventh day at an undisclosed hospital. Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said Mandela, who is 94, is continuing to make "steady improvement" while receiving treatment for a recurrence of a lung infection.

"His doctors say he continues to respond satisfactorily to treatment and is much better now than he was when he was admitted to hospital," he said. Maharaj said the former president was visited by relatives on Wednesday but gave no new details about his condition, and it remains unclear when he may be released from hospital. Mandela also received visitors on Monday, which was Family Day in South Africa, and his family expressed their appreciation for the outpouring of support that they have received from the public. Also on Wednesday, South Africa's Universal Channel apologized for accidentally airing an advertisement for an obituary for Mandela. "Like any international broadcaster, Universal Networks holds obituaries ready for every major statesman in the world," said a statement from the network. The channel, which airs on digital satellite TV service DStv, said the advertisement was aired as a result of a technical error by its team. "We unreservedly apologize to the Mandela family, to Universal Channel viewers and to DStv subscribers for the alarm and offense caused by this error," it said. Jackson Mthembu, a spokesman for the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's governing political party, said it was "shocked and outraged" by the advertisement. "This was uncalled for and totally insensitive on the part of DSTV as President Mandela is alive and receiving treatment for a recurring lung infection, as reported by the Presidency," he said. Mthembu said the party nonetheless welcomed the apology from DStv and Universal Channel. "We join millions of South Africans and people all over the world in wishing Madiba a speedy recovery and discharge from the hospital," he added, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. "We also join all those who are offering their prayers for the old Statesman to get better." On Sunday, when doctors reported a "further improvement" in Mandela's condition, South African President Jacob Zuma thanked fellow South Africans who prayed for Mandela at Easter church services during the weekend. "We also thank all people at home and around the world, who continue to keep Madiba and his family in their thoughts and to show their love and support in various ways," he said. The sudden hospitalization late at night on March 27 immediately raised new concerns about the former president's health. On Saturday, doctors said Mandela was able to breathe without difficulty after they withdrew excess fluid that had accumulated in the space surrounding his lungs. Prior to Saturday's procedure, however, Maharaj had said that Mandela was in "good spirits" and "making steady progress," but he made no mention of breathing problems. The government has been repeatedly criticized for being reluctant to provide more specific details about Mandela's situation, causing uncertainty. Earlier, on Thursday morning, Zuma had wished Mandela a speedy recovery but said he has "full confidence" in the medical team. "We appeal to the people of South Africa and the world to pray for our beloved Madiba and his family and to keep them in their thoughts," he said at the time. Later that day, U.S. President Barack Obama, speaking from the White House, also sent his best wishes to Mandela. "Obviously we're all deeply concerned with Nelson Mandela's health," he said after meeting with African leaders. "He's a hero I think to all of us. And we will be keeping him in our thoughts and prayers, and his entire family. Obama added: "[Mandela] is as strong physically as he's been in character and in leadership over so many decades, and hopefully he will come out of this latest challenge. But we all recognize that he has given everything to his people, the people of South Africa, to the people of the continent, and he's ended up being an inspiration to all of us." 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 later was 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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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.

3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168

Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA

(702) 943.0321 Local

(702) 943.0233 Facsimile

info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com