

# South African Doctors Say Mandela 'Much Better'

Former South African president and anti-apartheid titan **Nelson Mandela** is making "steady improvement" under treatment for pneumonia and is much better now than when he was hospitalized a week ago, the government said on Wednesday.

The three-sentence statement from President Jacob Zuma's office was the most upbeat since the 94-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate was admitted to hospital with a recurrence of a lung infection.

"His doctors say he continues to respond satisfactorily to treatment and is much better now than when he was admitted to hospital on the 27th of March 2013," the statement said.

Doctors have already drained excess fluid from Mandela's lungs, allowing him to breathe without difficulty, the government said in previous bulletins.

It is the third health scare in four months for Mandela, who became South Africa's first black president in 1994 and is hailed as a global symbol of tolerance and harmony.

He was in the hospital briefly in early March for a check-up and was hospitalized in December for nearly three weeks with a lung infection and after surgery to remove gallstones.

That was his longest stay in hospital since his release from prison in 1990 after serving almost three decades behind bars on a conviction of conspiracy to overthrow the white-minority government.

Mandela stepped down after one term as president in 1999. He has not been politically active for a decade but is still revered worldwide for leading the struggle against apartheid

and then championing racial reconciliation while in office.

Global figures such as U.S. **President Barack Obama** have sent get-well messages. During the Easter weekend South Africans who have become used to reports of his increasingly frail health over the last decade remembered him in their prayers.

“He’s like a king but he is not a king. He is even bigger than that. He was our first president,” said bus driver Phila Masimula. However, praise has not been universal.

Some South Africans accuse Mandela of selling out to the white minority in 1994 in his quest to forge a “Rainbow Nation” from the ashes of apartheid. Despite strong economic growth in the two decades since white rule ended, South Africa remains one of the world’s most unequal societies with white households enjoying incomes six times higher on average than black ones.

“Mandela kept on saying, ‘I am here for the people, I am the servant of the nation.’ What did he do? He signed papers that allowed white people to keep the mines and the farms,” said 49-year-old Majozi Pilane, who runs a stall selling fruits, sweets and cigarettes in the heart of the black township of Soweto.

“He did absolutely nothing for all the poor people of this country.”

Mandela’s last notable public appearance was at the final of the soccer World Cup in 2010. Since then, he has stayed at his home in Johannesburg or in Qunu, the remote village where he was born in the impoverished province of Eastern Cape.

Mandela has a history of lung problems dating back to when he contracted tuberculosis as a political prisoner. He spent 27 years in prison on Robben Island and in other jails.

*and Jon Herskovitz; Editing by Pascal Fletcher and Mark Heinrich*

*© 2013 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.*