

South Africa begins a week of mourning for Desmond Tutu

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A mourner puts flowers on Wall of Remembrance for Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Cape Town.
[Rodger Bosch/AFP] (AFP)

Cape Town, December 27 (RHC)-- South Africa has started a week of mourning to honor anti-apartheid icon and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who died in a Cape Town nursing home on Sunday at age 90.

Bells rang at midday on Monday from the city's St George's Anglican Cathedral, where the Nobel laureate had urged South Africans of all races to work together against apartheid. They will toll for 10 minutes at noon for five days.

"We ask all who hear the bells to pause their busy schedules for a moment in tribute to Archbishop Tutu," said the current Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba.

Meanwhile, people laid flowers at the Cathedral, in front of Tutu's home in Cape Town's Milnerton area, and in front of his former home in Soweto, Johannesburg. Cape Town's City Hall, Arch for Arch -- a monument commemorating Tutu -- and the iconic Table Mountain were also illuminated in purple, acknowledging the trademark purple clerical shirt the Anglican priest often wore with a white tab collar.

Several events in South Africa are being planned throughout the week to honor Tutu's life.

On Wednesday, the Diocese of Pretoria and the South African Council of Churches will hold a memorial service in the capital city, Pretoria. On the same day, Cape Town is set to host an interfaith ceremony, Al Jazeera's Fahmida Miller reported from the city, saying the event "speaks to the way the archbishop was viewed in terms of inclusivity."

Then on Friday, Tutu's body will lie in state at St George's before a requiem mass is held there on Saturday morning. Tutu's ashes will be buried in a mausoleum in the cathedral.

Makgoba said 400 people have already indicated they wish to attend the January 1st service, due to start at 10 a.m. (12:00 GMT). However, existing COVID-19 rules cap gatherings at 200 people.

Commemorative events are also being planned in the neighboring countries of Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said flags would be flown at half-staff nationwide and at South African diplomatic missions abroad until the night before Tutu's funeral service. "In the days to come, we will mourn this global icon of peace and freedom," he said in a national address late on Sunday.

"We will recount his achievements, we will recall his teachings and we will cherish fond memories of this man who always tempered criticism with compassion."

Ramaphosa urged all South Africans to "pay respects to the departed and to celebrate life with the exuberance and the purpose of our beloved Archbishop. May we follow in his footsteps. May we too be worthy inheritors of the mantle of service, of selflessness, of courage, and of principled solidarity with the poor and marginalised."

The archbishop, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, worked against South Africa's apartheid regime that oppressed the country's Black majority. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, when South Africa became a democracy, Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that documented atrocities and sought to promote national reconciliation. Tutu also became one of the world's most prominent religious leaders to champion LGBTQ rights.



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