

Nelson Mandela continues to respond to treatment, gov't says

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USPA News - A South African presidential spokesman on Saturday said anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela is continuing to respond to treatment, even though his hospitalization for a lung infection and a procedure to remove gallstones has now entered a third week. South African President Jacob Zuma visited Mandela at 1 Military Hospital near South Africa's executive capital, Pretoria, on Saturday morning to assure him of the love and support from people across South Africa and around the world.

"Madiba continues to respond to treatment," presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. The South African government has ignored increasing criticism from both the public and the media for its failure to provide more specific details and circumstances about the condition of Mandela. No media coverage was allowed of Zuma's hospital visit on Saturday and few specific details were made available to the public. "We urge South Africans to continue praying for our beloved Madiba during this period. Our hearts are with the whole family and relatives," Zuma said in a brief statement after his hospital visit. Maharaj said Zuma assured Mandela of the love and support of all people, both young and old. Mandela, 94, was hospitalized on December 8 at 1 Military Hospital 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 as Mandela was undergoing tests. Earlier this week, Maharaj said doctors were satisfied that Mandela's progress has been consistent with his age. "They say there is no crisis, but add that they are in no hurry to send him home just yet until they are satisfied that he has made sufficient progress," he said on Tuesday. "We urge the public to continue supporting Madiba, but at the same time to understand that he is 94 years old and needs extraordinary care. If he spends more days in hospital, it is because that necessary care is being provided." On December 15, the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF), whose members include major South African news organizations, harshly criticized the government's handling of information relating to Mandela's hospitalization. SANEF said it had earlier worked with the government to develop a protocol which would protect Mandela's privacy, but media representatives did not hear back after reaching a verbal agreement. "What is remarkable about this process is that competing news organisations came together in the interests of Mr. Mandela's privacy and dignity so that media coverage of his hospitalization would be ethical, accurate and restrained," Patrick Conroy of eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) said last week. "Despite our best efforts to work with the Government we have now been demonized in public and misled." 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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