

Mandela remains critical but is not in a vegetative state: presidency

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USPA News - The condition of anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela, who is being treated at a South African hospital for a recurrence of a lung infection, remained critical on Thursday but doctors have denied information in court documents that claimed he is in a vegetative state. Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said Mandela, who is 94, remains in a critical but stable condition.

"[He] has been and remains under the care of a multi-disciplinary panel of South African medical experts drawn from the South Africa Military Health Services, the public sector, the universities and the private sector," he said. Maharaj added that, under this panel, a team of doctors, nurses, paramedics and other health professionals attend to Mandela on a 24-hour basis. "The doctors deny that the former President is in a vegetative state," he said, rejecting previous reports citing court documents that said the anti-apartheid icon is being kept alive by a breathing machine and facing impending death. Also on Thursday, commenting on the Mandela family's feud, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu appealed for them to dig deep within themselves to "find the grace that their patriarch and the nation deserves at this sombre moment." He made the comments in a statement issued by his foundation. "Please, please, please may we think not only of ourselves. It's almost like spitting in Madiba's face," Tutu said, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. "We cannot imagine how difficult it must be for a family to endure being physically separated from its father for the 27 years that Mr Mandela spent in prison, only to have to share him with the world when freedom came." Mandela was hospitalized last month with increasing fears that the former leader may soon die. "Your anguish, now, is the nation's anguish - and the world's," Tutu added in his appeal to the icon's family. "We want to embrace you, to support you, to shine our love for Madiba through you. Please may we not besmirch his name." 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 it 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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