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Mandela Washington Fellows honor Mandela's legacy through service

By REBECCA BYCOTT

What is the best way to honor the memory of a world leader who made a profound impact on countless lives?

Mandela Day, which falls on Nelson Mandela's birthday, July 18, is one of many ways the world celebrates Mandela's legacy. As South Africa's first black president, Mandela brought an end to apartheid, serving as a global advocate for human rights and spreading a message of peace and unity. Every year, Mandela Day is a global call to action to communities worldwide to serve others, a reminder that everyone has the ability and the responsibility to change the world.

Today, July 18, 2018, marks 100 years since his birth, and to celebrate this remarkable milestone, we invite you to join us in reflecting on some of his most powerful quotes and learning more about the Mandela Washington Fellowship exchange program and how Fellows, which now number 3,700, are carrying on his legacy, not just today but every day.

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is more than a name—it's the continuation of Nelson Mandela's legacy of peace and service through leadership. The flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), this fellowship empowers young African leaders through academic coursework, leadership training, and networking opportunities. In 2018, the Fellowship is providing 700 outstanding young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa with the opportunity to hone their skills at a U.S. higher education institution with support for professional development after they return home. Institutes focus on leadership and skills development in one of three tracks: Business and Entrepreneurship, Civic Leadership, or Public Management. The Fellows, who are between the ages of 25 and 35, have established records of accomplishment in promoting innovation and positive impact in their organizations, institutions, communities, and countries. Fellows represent all 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and include equal numbers of men and women.

Twenty-seven American colleges and universities in 22 states and the District of Columbia are participating in hosting this year's Mandela Washington Fellows, who develop lasting connections with Americans and enrich local communities while enhancing their skills through classroom sessions, experiential learning, and community engagement.

At Wagner College, one of the Mandela Washington Fellowship host institutes, Fellows have volunteered as mentors for "MOVE Beyond the Bench," a Wagner College program designed to help enhance student learning through academic, cultural, and civic development.

“Our students are becoming better leaders because of their interactions with the YALI Fellows,” said Ruta Shah-Gordon, Vice President for Internationalization, Intercultural Affairs, and Campus Life at Wagner College. “They find some of their most rewarding experiences through cultural exchanges and mentor sessions with Fellows.”

This year, Mandela Day celebrates 100 years since Nelson Mandela’s birth. Mandela Washington Fellows will honor his legacy of service leadership by giving back to communities nationwide. In 2018, Fellows will complete approximately 10,000 hours of community service in the United States during their six-week Fellowship experience. Simultaneously, the YALIServes campaign asks all 500,000 members of the YALI Network to organize or join a community service event between Mandela Day and International Youth Day (August 12th). To date, there are over 400 grassroots events happening in 43 countries across Sub-Saharan Africa by individual Network members, Mandela Washington Fellows, YALI Regional Leadership Center alums, and American Embassies.

Jayne Chelsea Bango is a 2018 Mandela Washington Fellow from the Republic of the Congo. This summer, she is participating in the Fellowship’s Public Management Institute at Howard University.

“Mandela exemplified servant leadership by putting the interests of his people first. This is what we’re trying to channel on Mandela Day,” Bango said. “When a shepherd is with his sheep, you see the sheep in front and the shepherd leading and overseeing from behind. And that was Mandela. Do you want to lead? You must put your people first.”

This year’s Mandela Washington Summit will also commemorate the 100th anniversary since Mandela’s birth. Representatives of the U.S. Government, private sector, and civil society will meet with Mandela Fellows during the State Department-sponsored Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit: Living Mandela’s Legacy in Washington, D.C. July 30-August 1. The Mandela Washington Fellowship and Summit fosters and builds relationships that support and expand U.S.-Africa cooperation on shared goals the continent.

To learn more about the Mandela Washington Fellowship and how they’re celebrating Mandela Day, check out #MyMandelaLegacy on social media.

About the Author: Becca Bycott serves in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.