

Mandela condition further improves on fourth day in

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USPA News - The condition of former South African President Nelson Mandela has further improved, the government said on Sunday, as the anti-apartheid icon spent a fourth day at an undisclosed hospital. He was hospitalized earlier this week for a recurrence of a lung infection.

Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said Mandela had a "restful day" and is continuing to receive treatment. "Government is satisfied that the doctors are providing the former President with the best medical care possible to enable his recovery and comfort," he said. "They have reported a further improvement in his condition." Also on Sunday, South African President Jacob Zuma thanked fellow South Africans who prayed for Mandela at various Easter church services during the weekend. "We also thank all people at home and around the world, who continue to keep Madiba and his family in their thoughts and to show their love and support in various ways," he said, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. No other details were released on Sunday, and it remains unclear when the 94-year-old anti-apartheid icon may be released from hospital. The sudden hospitalization late Wednesday immediately raised new concerns about the former president's health. On Saturday, doctors said Mandela was now able to breathe without difficulty after they withdrew excess fluid that had accumulated in the space surrounding his lungs. Prior to Saturday's procedure, however, Maharaj had said that Mandela was in "good spirits" and "making steady progress," but he made no mention of breathing problems. The government has been repeatedly criticized for being reluctant to provide more specific details about Mandela's situation, causing uncertainty. Earlier, on Thursday morning, Zuma had wished Mandela a speedy recovery but said he has "full confidence" in the medical team. "We appeal to the people of South Africa and the world to pray for our beloved Madiba and his family and to keep them in their thoughts," he said at the time. Later that day, U.S. President Barack Obama, speaking from the White House, also sent his best wishes to Mandela. "Obviously we're all deeply concerned with Nelson Mandela's health," he said after meeting with African leaders. "He's a hero I think to all of us. And we will be keeping him in our thoughts and prayers, and his entire family. Obama added: "[Mandela] is as strong physically as he's been in character and in leadership over so many decades, and hopefully he will come out of this latest challenge. But we all recognize that he has given everything to his people, the people of South Africa, to the people of the continent, and he's ended up being an inspiration to all of us." Earlier this month, 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 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 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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