

## Op-Ed Contributor Nelson Mandela-s Captive Audience: Path of Most Resistance

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It was back in the 1970s, when I was doing diabetes research in Britain, that I first learned of the political drama surrounding Nelson Mandela. At the time I never would have predicted that one day I, too, would be imprisoned by a repressive regime for advocating human rights and democracy.

By the time of his release from prison many years later, I had already spent 10 years in many labor camps and prisons in Vietnam, and was under house arrest. The Vietnamese communist government had never held a trial.

As I listened to the BBC on a small portable radio with earphones, the word of Mr. Mandela's release illuminated my mind like a lightning flash. The end to his 27 years in prison had come as a result of concerted international pressure on the government in Pretoria. Bravo, I thought, for the victory of dignity and hope over despair and hatred, of self-discipline and love over persecution and evil.

No government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people, the Freedom Charter that Mr. Mandela helped draft in 1955 had declared. A government founded on injustice and inequality robs people of their rights; a country can never be prosperous until people enjoy equal rights and opportunities; the people must govern; the people must share in the country's wealth.

Mr. Mandela's struggle was to me &mdash; as it is to activists throughout the world &mdash; a shining, vivid example of the courage it takes to fight for liberty.

Three months after Mr. Mandela's release, on May 11, 1990, I issued a manifesto for a nonviolent movement to rally support for the basic rights of the Vietnamese people, a multiparty system and free and fair elections. One month later, I was arrested again and sentenced to 20 years of hard labor. In prison, and still today, Mr. Mandela has guided my steps on what he has called "the long walk to freedom."

Nguyen Dan Que is a doctor in Vietnam who has been imprisoned three times.