
Firm Unveils Mandela Manuscript Exhibit

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On July 8, WilmerHale celebrated the official opening of its Nelson Mandela Manuscript Exhibit, which has a new and prominent home in the firm's Washington DC office. In honor of late founding partner and civil rights giant Lloyd N. Cutler, the exhibit occupies a room off of the main lobby named in Cutler's honor. John Payton, director-counsel and president of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and former WilmerHale partner, delivered a keynote address at the exhibit's opening attended by members of the firm, select firm alumni and distinguished guests from prominent outside organizations. The event was also broadcast to WilmerHale's offices around the globe. The stunning exhibit features a video display and glass-encased selection of copies of former President Nelson Mandela's speeches and papers, including transcripts of his speech at the 1963-64 Rivonia treason trial that resulted from his opposition to apartheid in South Africa. The collection also includes notes that Mandela made in his own handwriting both during his trial and as he sat in prison on the night before he heard the sentence on his life.

Mandela dedicated these very personal and historically significant materials—what Cutler described collectively as a “priceless artifact of world history”—to the firm by handwritten inscription on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the founding of our legacy firm Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering to honor its decades-long work supporting the anti-apartheid movement and “the struggle for human rights and a just constitutional order in South Africa.” Perhaps the most important aspect of that work was Cutler's early 1980s co-founding of the Southern Africa Legal Services and Legal Education Project (SALSLEP), which provided enormous financial and legal support to the Legal Resources Centre, an organization comprised of the preeminent anti-apartheid lawyers within South Africa. SALSLEP's tireless and unwavering support of the Legal Resources Centre was instrumental in its ultimately successful efforts to end apartheid in South Africa and to free Mandela.

The design, content editing and citing of the new Nelson Mandela Manuscript Exhibit reflect the hard work of a subcommittee of the firm's Washington DC Diversity Committee, consisting of Lou Cohen, Tanya Massey, Dana Rooks, Kenneth Imo and Justin Fairfax; firm interior designer and project manager Noël Adams; and exhibit design firm Propp + Guerin. In the years since President Mandela's inscribed papers and speeches were personally presented to Cutler, who accepted them on behalf of the firm, by South Africa's Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson in 1997, they have been displayed in various spaces within the firm, but never found a permanent worthy home. Until

now.

The preceding article was first published in the summer issue of the [Diversity Committee's quarterly newsletter](#).