Beat: Health

Mandela breathing without difficulty after minor procedure

-, 31.03.2013, 03:17 Time

USPA News - Former South African President Nelson Mandela, who was hospitalized on late Wednesday evening for a recurrence of a lung infection, is now breathing without difficulty after undergoing a minor procedure, a presidential spokesman said on Saturday. Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said doctors withdrew excess fluid that had accumulated in the space surrounding Mandela`s lungs as a result of the infection.

"This has resulted in him now being able to breathe without difficulty," he said. "He continues to respond to treatment and is comfortable." No other details were released Saturday, and it is unclear when the 94-year-old anti-apartheid icon may be released from hospital. "The Presidency wishes to acknowledge and thank all who have been praying for and sending messages of support to Madiba and his family," Maharaj said, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. The sudden hospitalization late Wednesday immediately raised new concerns about the former president`s health, especially as officials have been reluctant to provide more specific details. Maharaj had said on Friday that Mandela was in "good spirits" and "making steady progress." In a brief statement on Thursday, South African President Jacob Zuma 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. Later on Thursday, 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.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-718/mandela-breathing-without-difficulty-after-minor-procedure.html

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