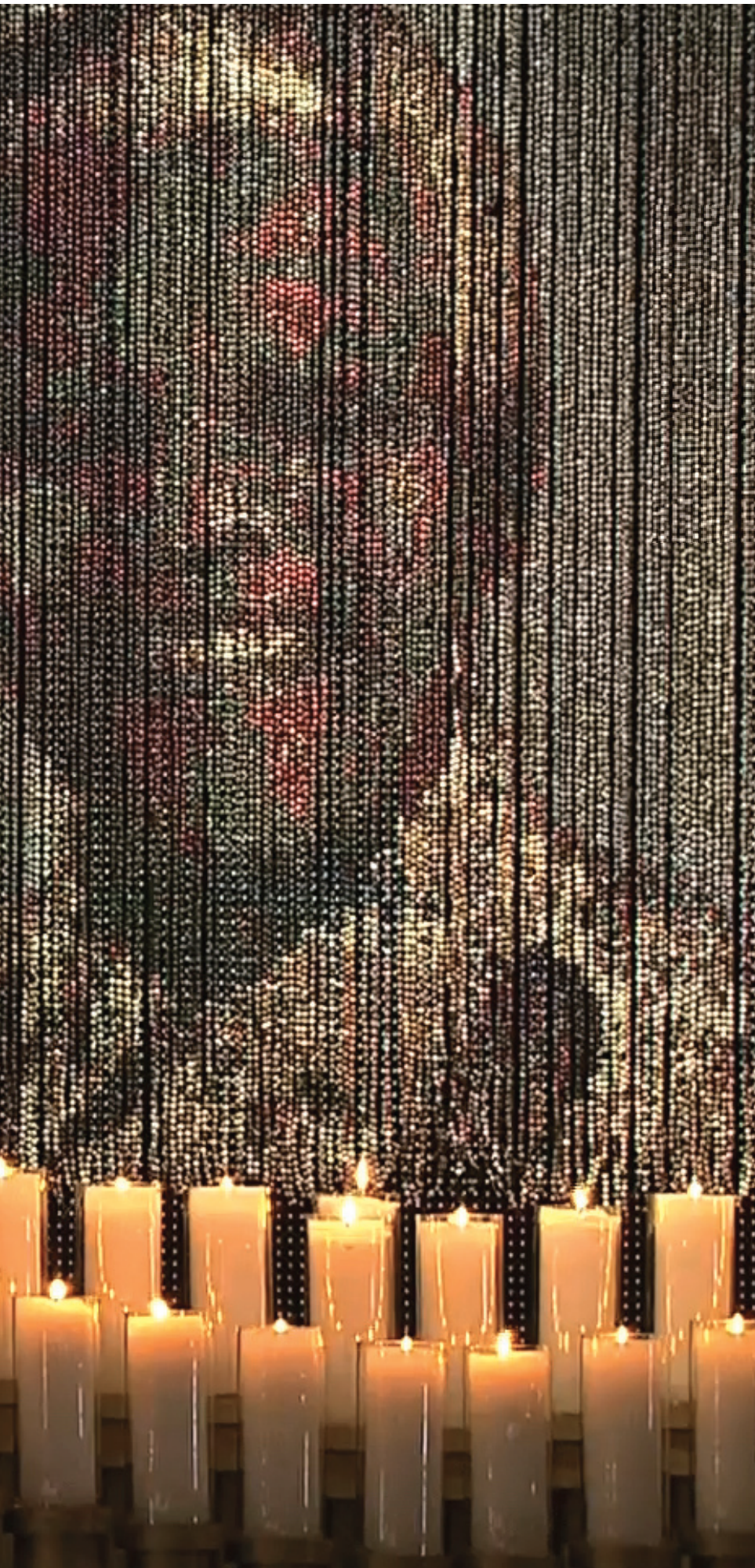




**MANDELA FAREWELL** Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda speaks during the funeral service for South Africa's former president, the late Nelson Mandela, in his childhood village of Qunu on 15 December. Mandela was buried near the homestead, ending 10 days of national mourning, and global tributes for the prisoner-turned-president who transformed his country and inspired the world.



AFP PHOTOS/ABC

# A WREATH FOR NELSON MANDELA

BY **Jayantha Dhanapala**

**MADIBA'S LONG WALK THROUGH LIFE ENDED AFTER 95 YEARS.** It was an epic and inspirational journey of self-sacrifice for the causes he believed in; persecution and pain endured stoically; 27 years of solitary confinement amidst the deafening silence of the great powers who now join in acclaiming him; crowned with the final victory of liberating his people from the enslavement of apartheid, to being equal partners in a non-racial democracy of which he was fittingly elected the first President.

I had the privilege of meeting Nelson Mandela on his final appearance before the UN General Assembly on 21 September 1998, when he concluded his speech saying, wistfully: "As I sit in Qunu and grow as ancient as its hills, I will continue to entertain the hope that there has emerged a cadre of leaders in my own country and region, on my continent and in the world, which will not allow that any should be denied their freedom as we were; that any should be turned into refugees as we were; that any should be condemned to go hungry as we were; that any should be stripped of their human dignity as we were... Were all these hopes to translate into a realisable dream and not a nightmare to torment the soul of the aged, then will I, indeed, have peace and tranquillity. Then would history and the billions throughout the world proclaim that it was right that we dreamt and that we toiled to give life to a workable dream."

Have we failed or fulfilled Mandela's hopes?

Greed for power and grievance for revenge was not in Mandela's political philosophy. Stepping down gracefully after one term as president and setting in motion a process of nation building, reconciliation and healing of the deep wounds of apartheid will be his enduring example to the world – and to us in Sri Lanka, who have still to see such a political leader emerge in our own midst.