

Breaking Taboo, Mandela Reveals Son Died Of AIDS

By **MICHAEL WINES**

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SALT ROCK, South Africa, Jan. 6 — Nelson Mandela, who has devoted much of his life after leaving South Africa's presidency to a campaign against AIDS, said today that his 54-year-old son had died of the disease in a Johannesburg clinic.

The son, Makgatho L. Mandela, who was a lawyer, had been seriously ill for more than a month, but the nature of his ailment had not been made public before his death today.

At a news conference in the garden of his Johannesburg home, the elder Mr. Mandela, 86, said that he was revealing the cause of his son's death to focus more public attention on AIDS, which is still a taboo topic among many South Africans.

To keep the illness secret would wrongly imply that it is shameful, he said.

"That is why I have announced that my son has died of AIDS," he said. "Let us give publicity to H.I.V./AIDS and not hide it, because the only way to make it appear like a normal illness like TB, like cancer, is always to come out and say somebody has died because of H.I.V./AIDS, and people will stop regarding it as something extraordinary for which people go to hell and not to heaven."

Mr. Mandela gave the statement surrounded by his family, including his wife, Graca Machel, his daughter Makaziwe and his grandchildren. Makgatho was Mr. Mandela's only surviving son; his younger son, Thembekile, died in an auto accident in 1969, shortly after Mr. Mandela began 27 years of imprisonment as punishment for his anti-apartheid activities.

Makgotho and his sister, Makaziwe, who survives him, were from Mr. Mandela's first marriage, to Evelyn Mase, who died in May at 82.

Both personally and through his Nelson Mandela Foundation, Mr. Mandela has campaigned for greater awareness and acceptance of AIDS and H.I.V., the virus that causes the disease, for the last three years. As he announced his son's death, he said that he had not known about his son's H.I.V. status when he began his campaign.

He did not say whether his son had been receiving antiretroviral therapy, the drug regimen that can prolong the lives of many people infected with H.I.V. for years, if not

decades. Antiretrovirals have been available through private doctors in South Africa for some time, but the current government has lagged in extending the treatment to scores of thousands of South Africans who need the drugs but cannot afford them, a delay Mr. Mandela has publicly criticized.

Some five million South Africans have H.I.V., the most of any nation, although the adult infection rate — about one in eight — is lower than in many other sub-Saharan nations.

Makgatho Mandela had been ill since he entered Linksfield Clinic in Johannesburg in late November, and his father canceled a number of appearances to be at his bedside during that time. After word of his hospitalization spread in December, the family issued an appeal for privacy, stating that members would talk to the press at an appropriate time.

Makgotha Mandela worked as an insurance underwriter before earning a law degree in 1997, being admitted to the South African bar in 2000 and becoming counsel and consultant to Standard Bank here. He also was an executive of a South African health care company and had only recently resigned as corporate secretary of the South African operations of Diner's Club.

His wife, Zondi, died of pneumonia in 2003 at age 46. He is survived by four sons.

John O'Neil contributed reporting from New York for this article.